ODD YARNS OF ENGLISH LAKELAND

WILLIAM T. PALMER

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ODD YARNS OF ENGLISH LAKELAND

BY WILLIAM T. PALMER

Editor of "The Journal of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club"

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ODD YARNS OF ENGLISH LAKELAND

NARRATIVES OF ROMANCE, MYSTERY
AND SUPERSTITION TOLD BY
THE DALESFOLK

BY

WILLIAM T. PALMER

Editor of "The Journal of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club"

AUTHOR OF
'ODD CORNERS IN ENGLISH LAKELAND," "LAKE COUNTRY RAMBLES,
"IN LAKELAND DELLS AND FELLS," "THE ENGLISH LAKES," ETC.

WITH A PREFACE

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

London
SKEFFINGTON & SON
34 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C
PUBLISHERS TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING
1914

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PREFACE

To those who only know it in holiday sun—or rain !—who go to it for rest from hard work, or that periodical bath of beauty without which the spirit of many a modern withers to its death, the English Lakeland is an " unsubstantial faery place," made for man's delight. The colours of the fells, the play of the sun-gleams, the shifting of the mists, the change from loveliness to grandeur, from tameness to magnificence, the wildness of the mountain-tops, the delicacy of the valleys—we are apt to look upon them all as there for our pleasure—the pleasure of the sojourner and the stranger, who comes to Lakeland not to live in it, but to ask of it the means of living with more vitality elsewhere. Even in these days of local research, of Grasmere plays and folk dancing, of respect for local customs and care for local dialect, most of us are still inclined—in thought—to brush away the life that is already in the dales when we come to them, and to bring instead our own life and ideas, watching jealously how the mountains may help *us* back to health of mind or body, to sounder nerves and quicker imagination.

But the dales when we approach them are already brimming with life of their own; and if we would feel their full spell, we must "put off" ourselves as we enter them, and "put on" that native life. There is much change indeed during the last half-century—since I first wandered as a child of seven over the slopes of Scandale Fell and by the stream of Sweden Bridge. But human nature, and human speech in the high fell-farms, and wherever the motor chars-à-bancs are not, are still rugged and simple; the arts of shepherd and sheep-dog are much as they were in Wordsworth's day; and the coming of the motor has not spoilt the winter silences of Watendlath and Seathwaite. Still we do well to be very careful of everything that remains; to gather up all that we can of the treasures of the past, its modes of life, its habits of speech, its types of character, while yet there is time, and to welcome those observers who like Mr. Palmer have the Lakeland in their blood, and possess the twin keys of sympathy and natural kinship which unlock the secrets of the dales and the lips of the Cumbrian folk. The records which this volume contains of old customs and superstitions, of the parsons, schools and farmers of a bygone day, are gathered, Mr. Palmer assures us, direct from the countryside. They are of course of varying interest. But at least the tale of the "Night Shepherds," or sheep-stealers—the best in the book—would have

delighted Stevenson, and there are many other passages and fragments equally vivid. In Borran's Field, by the side of Windermere, excavation has just brought to light the lines of a Roman fort, fired probably more than once in the course of its history by the rush of hill-folk from the fells. Among its ruins are fragments of Samian pottery which waft one in thought to the Ægean: an enamelled button of the finest Eastern work, and a pair of sandals which might have belonged to a child or a youth. When the Roman soldiers who brought these things to the banks of Windermere sat drinking by their camp fires, such an adventure as that of the "Night Shepherds" might have happened at any time on the high fells which look down upon the lake. A thousand years hence, in the remoter valleys, the tale will ring, probably, no less true. It is this "timelessness" which gives value and charm to all sincere records of the primitive earth-born life; and it is in its name that all lovers of the Lakes will welcome Mr. Palmer's attractive volume.

MARY A. WARD.

1914.

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ODD YARNS OF ENGLISH LAKELAND

ON ODD YARNS

THESE "Odd Yarns" have been collected over a long series of years in all sorts of places in our land of dales and lakes and fells. Sometimes one has sat by a roaring log fire in baronial (or manorial) hall, now the farm kitchen, and sometimes by the peat-blaze in the shepherd's cottage far remote from any neighbour. And often there has been the whistling of the snow or the sullen roar of rain to add a touch of terror to the yarns. One has gossiped with parson and poacher, with schoolmaster and shepherd and stone-breaker, and has fraternised with them as only a born dalesman can. These yarns are told as such, pretty nearly as they were given to me in many cases, though one must justly add that many are compilations, selections from many contradictory versions, told by different folks and in different dales, of the same stock tale. In others one has collected a shred of anecdote here, a patch of hint there, and, by aid of a hank from some frowsy old history or even

annotated kitchen account-book, woven the yarns finally into some comprehensible tale.

These yarns are not history: they are stories told round the firesides, in the lanes and on the open fells—wherever dalesfolk happen to congregate. And certainly the narratives give a pretty fair idea of the character of our lakeland dwellers who yet live in peace and industry, and are not harried by "visitors" who bring in manners and customs from the hither corners of civilisation. My yarns prove, I believe, that we are still wonderfully near the good old days of Romance, Legend and Superstition.

It is hardly necessary to add that none of the yarns have a personal application, and that many names of places and persons introduced must not be taken as real. Even the names of farms, markets, etc., are assumed.

SOME LOVE YARNS

Old Ned the stone-breaker has entertained me with many a yarn of the old days and the new. To-day, when I came up to his rough shelter, he was already grinning. "There's Bob Machell just gone by, and he tells me that old Willy Hoggart is going to get wed at last. Why-a why-a, there must be summat catching about these weddings. Nobbut at Whissunda' there was four as canty old bachelors on our big farms as anywhere under the sun, and you see what's happened. Why-a, why-a, it was nobbut right that when John Mounsey courted Will Thompson's housekeeper that Will should see after himself and take up with the other chap's housekeeper. He chiselled him gay well an' all, and gat his honeymoon nicely ower, while Mrs. John-to-be had to keep house at Garth Heads and John had to scrat away for hissel for three weeks wi'out a woman body to look after his servants. And at that Miley Capstick got in a bit of a fullock: he wouldn't wed *his* housekeeper, not he, nor any other man's servant, but he just went over to Dun Hall, and what, him and the daughter there had it fixed up in no time at all. They say that she says she never saw him until he come up to the house

on the job. Maybe, but if that was so-a, then he would be the only man that went to Murton market that she hadn't had her eyes gayly well on. But after all, bairn, they're nowder on them forty yet, and what, John Mounsey'll be well over fifty, and Will Thompson's no bairn. What, he was born that winter our cow died at Borrans—just forty-seven year next month.

" Aye, aye, courting's always a queer job. I've heard the parson say many a time that young folks should consider and pray about it, but maistly, what, they go into it head-a-ma-neckum, and there's a good sight more dancing than praying thought about. But I remember gay weel one chap as wasn't that way. He lived ower Lorton way, and belike had looked once or twice at a lass that lived a bit down the dale. I don't think he was like the lad in Reddale as telt his mother that he liked a servant lass at such and such a farm gay well, and she telt him that he must gang up and see her. The lad was back in half an hour. ' Did thou see her? ' ' Aye, mother, and if I hadn't dowked behind the wall she would have seen me.' Well, one morning this Lorton fellow looked in at the dairy door and said, without coming any ways near to her, ' Jane, I've thought of getting weddt, and thou's the likeliest lass I know. Just thou think about it and I'll call as I come back from market.' He did—aye, and she was glad enough to wed him. I once asked my old dame what she would have done if I'd asked her like that, and she says, ' I'd have clouted thy

lugs for such impudence,' and by gum, I'm certain she would and all."

When Ned brings in a mention of his " old dame " —and that's pretty often—it means that the subject is to his liking. " Aye, aye, I like to hear of new weddings. What, there used to be never a bachelor of age in our dale when every family had its own bit of land. The only way to keep the bits of farms together was by wedding, for Jinnie's bit of brass on her folks's farm was conny useful to clear Bob's sisters' share in the small estate. And there used to be a canny bit to eat and drink, particularly drink, at a wedding in those days—not that they ever miss Ned's glass now, not they. But somehow a noggin goes as far as a quart did then.

" There used to be courting laws in the different dales. If a chap come poaching from town or other dale, what, he must pay his footing. And again, afore he was weddt there must be another pay. But both were nobbut drink money for the young fellows of the dale. And then, as I was telling our Jim's youngest as has just started courting, her grandmother and me nobbut saw one another once a month. It used to be looked on by the old folks as a sin that a lass should look the side of a lad—but never the other way round, however. I don't know what it must have been in my grandfather's time, but then you can near see Gretna Green from the top of the hill there, and it was even nearer to the boat at Skinburness, where you could easy get into Scotland, where any sort of a wedding with

witnesses was a good one. But my uncle ran away with a farmer's daughter from Holme way, and the two sailors as were their witnesses were made drunk by the pressgang and never seen more. About once a year, when he was tight after the Martinmas fair, my uncle used to cast it up that Aunt Sally couldn't prove that she was wed at all. 'Why-a, Ned,' she said once to me, 'I used to fret at first when he said it: then I would give him a good lethering with the brush stick—but now, why, I nobbut pity him and toss a bucket of cold water at his head.'" Ned harked back to his own courtship: "Mally was like t'other lasses, nobbut she was brighter and better looking. She wasn't that daft ower me that she wanted me always about the farm where she was living. But once a month she agreed that I should see her, and wet or fine that night I would walk over the moor to her, getting to the house about eight o'clock, when all the folks were in bed. I used to throw some barley up at her window, because she didn't dare let the mistress know she had any chap, and then she'd come down and we'd court awhile. But Mally wasn't properly courted as t'other lasses in the dale were. It wasn't considered out of the way for a pair of courters to sit up all night in them years. How did we get wed, thinks thou? Well, I gat a chance of a small farm and I took it. Mally wasn't long of being down there as mistress either. I asked old John, her father, whether it was to be the smithy or the kirk, but Mally's mother rapped

out, ' I've had three sisters and two daughters wedded by the smith, and it's not taken well with any of them. The priest must have a try with Mally.' We had three fiddlers, and a real merry bridal."

I expressed the belief that these were curious tales. " Nay, nowt out of ordinary, bairn. Our parson once began routing through the old registers. ' Ned,' he says to me, ' there was a mighty few weddings here when you were young.' ' Aye,' I said, ' it's ower near Gretna for that,' and I telled him of another church where he'd find few burials of men in the books—they were near all hung at Carel—and of a book which shows that a pair were baptised, confirmed, wedded and took Holy Sacrament all in one morning.

" Why-a, why-a, you see the big house down yonder. The mistress there when I was a bairn had been brought as trade by a pedlar. Bad? Nowt of the sort. The old chap wanted a wife, and the pedlar found him a very nice one, nearly on his own doorstep. Aye, I dare say wives have been bought and sold—there's folk bad enough for owt—but I wouldn't say ' no ' to a handful of notes for showing a daft old farmer how to open his eyes.

" Courting, why-a, there was Jonas Burnthet what took forty year on the job—aye, with the same lass—then she went and wedded his nevvy—and dash if he didn't go and wed her niece. And a daft old mess they made of it. They were all

separated in a year, then Jonas died and left his brass to his old sweetheart. And she lived to be ninety-five afore she left hold of it. The nevvy and niece waited a bit for her to die, then went off to Canada in the huff together—and the dale was well quit on 'em."

Bit by bit I got the old chap back to a different theme. And I quoted (because I guessed he would hate it) the line—

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

"Not on a farm, nor in our dale. What use would a fellow maisled with love be on a hill-side when the ewes are lambing and the spot is be-devilled with foxes and sheep worriers; or a lass crying her eyes out (it takes some of them that way) when the calves and pigs are tearing the house down for something to eat? No, winter is the time for love-making in our dales. The lads finish milking and bed the cows down at dark'ning, and the shep-herd comes in from fell or field. And it's many a hour to morning. Not that the lasses have such fine times on it. Why, look at that house—two mile of bog and moor from a decent road. In the dark a manbody can't easy come at it, to say nothing of a rowky, snowy night. The lasses up there must get out and home by daylight. I don't think that the town is as gay for courters as it used to be, but then both folks and things have changed a lot. Every public-house then, and there was dozens of

them, had its dancing-room, and fiddlers were kept mighty hard at it on a term time. Now, I think there isn't a dancing-room at any of the publics. There's two with pianos and whatnot in the town. And lasses go to little shops for a bit of dinner now : the publics are right out of fashion, but that's maybe as it should be, for I've known many a good pair spoiled by ale. In them days there was no Sunday School, no Band of Hope, no Cricket or Football Club, no Rummage Sales or Bazaars. What, every week in our Reading Room there's some sort of a pil-gill—a dance or a concert. Dancing was dancing in them days. I was quite shammed of the shuffling and showling and slethering that they called dancing when I went into the room on the Flower Show night. A lad and a lass to dance a reel had to know each other's steps exactly—and who more like to study one another than courters ? "

SOME GHOST YARNS

On Christmas Eve we all sat in the arch-ceiled kitchen of the old manorial hall, and in the glow of a log fire listened to and imagined tales of the olden days. Your North-countryman likes his evening yarns full of blood and mystery, and to-night was no exception to the rule. Moreover, there was something in the history of that Border pele which made its underground kitchen a suitable place indeed for these stories. In times of trouble, this was the final point of retreat. The loopholes on the floor above commanded every approach to the hall, and this kitchen was big enough to accommodate the cattle while the armed men lay above. And we knew that after a raid beyond the Border this kitchen would be filled with plundered goods, with maybe a sullen prisoner or two to be guarded until the day of the Warden and the exchange. Through all the yarns there seemed to be an undercurrent—a semi-belief in the possibility of witchcraft, and in the power of priests and other wise men as layers of evil and wandering spirits. I suppose that this sort of story began when the early Christian saint climbed to the abode of the wicked on Fiends Fell, and there

raised three crosses, after duly exorcising and banishing the previous occupants, finally calling the place by the name of Cross Fell. Nor were these stories of the weird and terrible confined to the elders : lads and lasses not long from school brought hearsay tales from distant farms at which they had been servants, showing that superstition dies hard in these lonely dales.

One story which impressed me was told by an old white-haired labourer who was a sort of relation—the Northerner honours his family connections, rich or poor, to the n^{th} degree—of the Hall folk. As he sat back against the wall of the ingle-nook, with clay pipe firm held between his three remaining teeth and the light flickering on his rugged face and gnarled hands, he made a picturesque figure indeed. " Thou may talk of flays and ghosts as thou likes, Michael. Thou can't deny that they are written in the Bible, and what's written there is true. There are plenty of folk nowadays as ill-gi'en as them witches as raised old Samuel for King Saul, but they haven't the heads as them old folk had. Noo, I've seen a flay. I was at a spot near the sea, and one wild night, coming home in the dark, I saw a light in front of me where no light should be. I went on across our fields, however, thinking that happen it might be a poacher at work. But it never got any nearer until I came into a lane, and there this ball of fire rested on the gate and showed it to me as plain as day. I wasn't for being frightened of it, and went on—and the

fire went rolling along the wall in front of me until it came under a tree, and then if it didn't turn and come rolling by me and away through the gate and back into the fields again. And there was another flay that was like a gurt dog without a head that rubbed against one's legs just outside the village. But one old castle that I lived at down at the bottom end of the county beat all for flays and ghosts and apparitions. It would have kept a priest with bell and book going for a month to lay the lot of 'em. Nay, I don't know who they were all supposed to be. Maybe they had been murdered in the castle in the olden days, for there had been some rare haybays there. One of the old towers was clean split in two, and an old lodge-keeper as used to live there when it happened says that it was cracked right down when one of the lords staked his own wife at cards. Nowt of the dow ever came of laking cards like that, I'll warrant. But the ghost I saw there was enough to make me hair stand on end. I was out one evening in the kitchen what time the lasses had been rung in to prayers—and old Squire was mighty particular that everybody inside the four walls went to evening prayers—so I thought I would have a break by stopping behind the passage door. But no sooner had I settled to it than a fine lady with a big ruffle round her neck (just like the picture of Sir Thomas upstairs) came down towards me. But I didn't want her to see me, so what did I do but bob backward into a sort of big cupboard there was at the end of that passage.

On she came, and I was gay frightened. I clashed the door to on myself, and gave a gurt shout that brought out the Squire from prayers with an old sword he had picked up. If he had stuck me then and there I wouldn't have cared, for—that—ghost —just—came—at—the—cupboard—door—like—as —if—there—was—nowt—in—the—way. And she had a red line round her throat that all at once seemed to burst into blood. The Squire packed me off, with one of the footmen to see me off the place, and dared me to tell any one in the castle about it. I can tell you I didn't want to think of it again, though for many a year she used to haunt me at nights after I had had a bit too much beer. I've been teetotal for fifty year now. Don't think I was drunk and imagined all about the ghost, for I hadn't had a drop of beer for a week, being out on the far end of the fell among the sheep."

Underground passages are attributed to every castle, and their length varies from two to ten miles—quite impossible things too. But one of the men knew a castle which had a real underground passage. "We'd just let the calves out for a bit in the park one warm February day, and blest if one didn't seem to be in bother in five minutes. There we could see it fidging about as if it couldn't get up. One doesn't like to think of young beasts all paralassed, so down two of us went. The young beggar had broken through a square spot, and there below, maybe about five foot down, was a passage. Jim was a bit of a

daring beggar, so he must down to see what way it went. And of course, getting to the bottom, he turned toward the castle. How far he would have gone I don't know, but just then the Squire come tearing down on horseback. 'Is there anybody down there?' 'Aye, Jim.' And auld man as Squire was, and not so lish on his feet, he off his horse like a two-year-old and was down that passage, swearing all blue around him. Jim came out in a bit less than no time—and was sent off to America in a very short time after. The Squire gave me five pund not to say owt about this passage, and one of the estate men, him as had been sworn in for such-like jobs, built the hole up again."

"Dosta remember the tale of the Kirkby tailor, as ran from a boggle? What, man, there was a nap-napping behind him as if somebody was following, and the faster Snip ran the faster clicked the fellow behind him. It was nobbut when he come to a stee, black-wet with running, that it strake him that the 'catch him, catch him' would be made by his own shears that he had in his tail pocket. And so-a it was."

But the sensation of the evening was a tale of the Evil One, told with evident belief. "Nay, nay, lads," said the old cowman, unwrapping the sacks he had worn the day through as leggings, "yan sud be careful in talking about Old Nick. I's like the lass as went to church and bowed twice in the Creed. Her missus axed her what the second bow was for, and the lass up and said, 'My mother allus

tellet me to make friends on both sides. The Devil mayn't be as bad as he's pictured, and yan might some day want him to do yan a turn.' There was four young fellows, two of them wedded, as were terr'ble card-lakers and drinkers. They were nowt of the dow anyway, for when they worn't drinking and carding they were poaching and cock-fighting or some such devilment. Well, yan neet they were carding and drinking away as usual, and one after another messages come that they were wanted at home. One's mother was dying, another had a cow taken bad, and sich like. But gang they wouldn't. 'We'll card until Old Nick hissel stops us,' said one of them. And after midnight—it was then Sunday—a gurt black hand come down from the ceiling and raked all the cards together into the middle of the table. They had their hands out an' all, but every card went in and was turned round under that black thumb. Then in a minute the hand went back to the ceiling, but not one of them chaps dare touch a card. Nor dare they stir from the table until it come broad daylight and the church bell began to ring for Holy Communion. Then Joe took up the tongs, and took hold of that pack of cards and put them on the fire. And while they were burning they all turned out blue lows, and the gurt black thumb-mark turned over in the fire once for every card there was in the pack."

SOME SCHOOL YARNS

I WONDER, I wonder, what sort of a time had we at school compared with our fathers who mustered down the selfsame tracks, crossed the same stepping-stones—one had almost added entered the same doorway, but then ! their school was in the church itself, and ours is only a shell of four walls by the roadside now. Certainly there was no Shrovetide cock-fighting, no barring-out, no general defiance of the master's authority for us. Our only privilege was the signing of a petition for holiday on Shrove (Pancake) Tuesday, Yak Bob Day (29th of May), and the 5th of November—and that petition was not always answered by a consent. More than once we signed for a half-holiday on the schoolmaster's birthday, which, if I recollect aright, we reckoned to coincide with the County Agricultural Show (third Thursday in September), held in town a few miles away. The school pence were much in vogue on a Monday morning : the cottagers used to pay weekly, but the farmers' children only after Christmas and midsummer holidays. Every child was called up in turn, and once, I remember, " Please, sir, mother said I had forgotten it " was offered (and accepted silently) as an excuse. One lad used to forget on alternate Mondays or so—and so did his

mate. The excuse was usually followed by a stern "Then go home for it" from the much-employed master, and the two used to sally out for a glorious half-hour's play before finding the necessary coins in their pockets. At one school, the first two members of a family paid full pence, the third and any others going free, but a string of six ranging from fourteen down to five years of age would not render the heart of any treasurer glad. By the way, during my own school-time I do not remember twins being at our dales school, which reminds me of a tale told of a wee fellow. His mother and father were discussing a certain family in which twins had just arrived, when Jackie interrupted, "I say, fadder, will they choke one on 'em, or will they keep it as a pet?" Our small Herdwick sheep are rarely able to nourish twin lambs properly, so that the weaklier is either put quietly to death or brought up artificially—by the bottle.

School children often had to come big distances in order to reach school at all: three miles either way was a mere trifle in any of our dales, and one knows of places where the children to-day are called upon to go five miles to school. The cart which the County Education Authorities provide and brag so much about is not for the benefit of such, but to cover the Committee's own cardinal sin of shutting dales schools with average attendances of six or seven. Councillor John Cook, of Cockermouth, tells us that the school at Wasdale Head was light-heartedly condemned to amalgamation because only

five children were being taught there. The Committee ordered that the children should be conveyed daily at the public expense to another school. Mr. Cook pointed out strongly that the five miles was along the shore of Wast Water, a veritable abode of winter storms—not one of the governing Committee had ever seen either road or school, and probably its permanent officials were in like case. But that little school at Wasdale Head deserved preservation in that it " busted " the mania for attendance records which disgraced elementary education a few years past. With its seven or eight sturdy dales children the school topped the county list for three years in succession—one hundred per cent. for never absent, never late. No wonder the dalesfolk ordered themselves a public luncheon to celebrate the victory.

Our fathers used to bring fuel for the school fire, and we had our turns at cleaning out the room, the girls scrubbing and washing, the boys being weight lifters and general assistants. What orderings, " bossings " we had to put up with—we are all anti-suffrage now. The dialect was ever a difficulty, for it *would* slip out. A " manny " (officious) pupil teacher made me stand on a form when I was in the infant's school for saying " E-ar " instead of " Ye-ar " as he put it. One lad the same day said " taties," and was given two handers for it. But in another school the master called to a lad, " Where have you put the chalk? " " I've putten it on t' shelf, sir," was the reply, for which Johnnie was

condemned to write a hundred times " I have put it on the shelf." But ten minutes later the next boy to Johnnie, squinting over the culprit's shoulder, burst into loud laughter, and was called sharply to account. " Please, sir, he's put ' putten ' where he sud ha'e putten ' put.' "

" It's nae use sending bairns to school," was objected, with much emphasis on the " bairns," by an ancient dame when it was proposed that wee Michael, aged six, should be " breeched " and sent to school after daytime. By the way, more than one lad I know (including myself) started school life in petticoats : in the dales full seven years old was the time to put on the distinctive habiliments of manhood and to start school. After all, the school days one best remembers are those when school broke up early. From November to April some of our distant scholars stayed at home—and we were mighty envious of them. Several never saw their home by daylight on school days in the depth of winter. Another band from an upper dale were stopped when heavy rain put the waters over the stepping-stones. Heavy snow meant a thin school : once in a school of fifty, wee Tommie, who had come pick-a-back on his big sister, represented the whole junior school. But the big lads always managed to wade through. Robin from the Wood Foot came through one wild morning, to the surprise of his schoolmaster. " Why-a, sir, I was bound to come, 'cos Tom Jackson ' spit his death ' to give me a good hiding to-day." This spitting

across fingers was a terrible oath, and no amount of reproof hindered its occasional use.

We had several games, probably of a rough order and not played by the present generation. Of course we had " prisoners' base " under the title of single and double " pot," but " maddie " bore the palm. Two lines about twenty yards apart were drawn across the road, outside the upper of which the gang assembled. One champion was placed in the centre, to capture, lift and " spit over " any of the charging boys he could manage. It was toward the middle that the game was liveliest, as the resistance of the bigger lads would be powerful and desperate. Striking, kicking and biting were barred, but there are plenty of other damaging methods known to the young savage. Three or even four juniors might seize a big fellow, bear him down by weight, and then cautiously lifting him clear of the ground, " spit " and claim possession. Another game played with big round beck cobbles was " ducky." A flat stone was first placed, on which one lad's ducky-stone was balanced. The others had to shy at this mark, but could not rescue their stones until a hit put " ducky off." If all the boys missed, then " ducky " made a dive for his stone, " tigged " the first he could reach, and ran for the base-line. If the new " ducky " could place his stone and " tig " some one who had not gathered theirs in time, then the duty passed on. " Ducky off " was the signal for a scramble for shied stones, and a rapid return to base. As may be

guessed, the game was exciting and played with boyish abandon. How serious damage from badly aimed and madly flung stones was escaped one doesn't know. "Futnaoaf," *i. e.* foot and a half, is still a progressive leap-frog in our school fields. One boy "set a back," which "leader" and his followers cleared, the last man in line called "foot-and-a-half," which distance the horse was entitled to step forward. The first to fail in his vault had to take the horse's place, and the whole game went back to the starting line again. One boy was always in trouble over this game. He was not valiant, but a first-class "leader," and would keep on clearing the horse with simple vaults after his followers thought "one" step inward desirable. The first boy to fail therefore was not unlikely to blame the leader, and to give him a good hiding. Football was a game nearly unknown to us, but we managed to enjoy ourselves fairly well with our hemlock squirts and bultree (elder) pop-guns, and felt no need for anybody's assistance with games. Bird-nesting was a great time, but the Acts have rendered the schoolboy chary of touching any of these. We feared only the switch, or heavy boot of the keeper—and timed our visits to the woods usually when he was far away.

Dramatic interruptions to lessons—well, we thought a couple of big stones thundering against the school door dramatic enough, and the schoolmaster deployed the elder lads at once to chase and capture the miscreants—a pair of lads from a

rival school in the next village. The chase was long and stern : the two fled at their best pace, and the scholars followed. At a mile and a half one of the lads halted. As he put it in later years he was " fair done for." But the scholars thought this a piece of defiance, halted, conferred and then turned tail, the lad urging them to speed with a number of well-flung stones. Quite a farmyard has resorted to one wayside school—a huge bull upsetting desks and forms—" breaking up school " with certainty, but no one was hurt, and the door is still left wide open on the warm summer days. A wild Herdwick, and the pursuing dog, are the only things of that sort one personally recollects.

School visitors—they were too terrible to be humorous, though the doctor who drove up once a year to vaccinate the dales babies tried hard to be funny. One wonders how he must have felt when his gayest quips failed to raise a smile anywhere ; but his inaccurate sidling toward the door while still in conversation with the schoolmaster was a tremendous success. The whole school held its breath until, at the psychological moment, he turned and banged the door cheek with his head—then we did laugh. Neither the squire nor the clergyman attempted or succeeded in anything funny except to misspell the announcements they wrote with such labour on the blackboard.

As a generation of school children we were, I think, a failure. We had no fights with the schoolmaster, nor did we plunder so many orchards that

the maddened farmer should come, gun in hand, to tell the school what he thought. We never barred out in order to get holidays, and only once fired a salvo of home-made squibs when we were not allowed the usual Guy Fawkes holiday. (What a bang, what a sulphury smell those squibs made—one never forgets that day nor the wholesale caning of nearly a score culprits.) We were sad, sad failures against those legendary boys who considered school a time, a place for play—yet managed to learn the most abstruse subjects with ease and skill.

YARNS OF OLD-FASHIONED FESTIVALS

(*a*) St. Valentine's Day

Old Jason, our postman of many years ago, never grumbled about Christmas letters—he had a splendid thirst and glasses were strong and plentiful, so that his return to his cobbler's shop was usually in a melodious condition. But there was a day in mid-February when the bag was still heavier, drinks were scarce—and at the outset his heart was sad. In his wrath he was wont to slight his present generation of courters: "A nice lot as can't bide to be out of one another's sight." In his days, courting had been done as gallantly without any scribbling and writing and wasting money on stamps, and no postman ever carried a love message for him. "Forbye what," he added sarcastically, "they're mainly what daftness and sic like. When that little schoolma'am sued the squire for breach, I was fair shammed of carrying sich letters. But then, if he missed seeing her for a day there was a gurt thick letter fra' him to her, and yan could near see the school from his hall—a matter of six or seven mile. And on valentine day there was allus two or three parcels for her. And she took them without a blush, every time."

Notwithstanding Jason, St. Valentine's Day was in those days in great favour among our lads and lasses—it was a day thought forward to with heating heart and recalled, oh ! sometimes with pleasure, sometimes with pain. There was a little shop in a back street of the town where valentines of all sorts and prices were to be purchased. It was kept by a sweet old dear with dried-apple cheeks, who certainly thought it a part of the bargain to address in a faint angular hand, stamp and post in due time the love token of either lad or lass. I am sure she sold other goods, for one could make a pretence of purchasing notepaper if any of one's friends, male or female, happened to catch you in the shop in early February. They were marvellously ornate things, those old valentines. A satin-lined box, an edging of perforated paper, forget-me-nots, and a heart fixed with Cupid's darts, were part of the thing, as also a most definite scent. One knew without asking which of the lasses had received valentines as they passed one at their work in kitchen or dairy. Sometimes the design included silver horseshoes for luck, or golden wedding-bells or interlocked rings, and the whole structure slid forward and disclosed a verse couched in most sentimental and high-flown language.

With us it was part of the beauty of St. Valentine's Day that the sending of any love missive must be kept a profound secret. No names were signed. If a name were used, it was to bait some amorous and incautious swain and was, of course, a forgery.

One is not prepared to say what passed between couples secretly or openly engaged on this matter: they were ever a law to themselves. Indeed, such a secret was often broken up by the sending of a valentine. If Mary, the belle of the dale, left all her treasures but one lying anywhere in her room, then dales logic had it that that one was from some one dear indeed. The lasses saw to it that Mary's beau was soon discovered, for the early settling of Mary's charms on one lad often opened up the local market for lovers considerably.

Old Jason, stumping with his heavy bag across the fold, was always a surprise on valentine day, and the lasses were curiously backward at answering his knock. "Sithee, lass, here's fower letters, likely valentines, for thee, and five for Mary, and one for li'le Meg. There's nowt for t' maister or mistress, and t' lads ha'e gotten theirs: they were down in t' plough and I gave them a shout." What heart-burnings there were when some lass was disappointed of a valentine altogether. Jock maybe had hung fire since the last toffy-join: sheep's eyes enough had been cast: he had blushed fierce crimson when in church she caught him staring at her, and on Sunday night he had said "Goodnight" in such yearning tones as she passed him on her way home. Yes, she had thought—and perhaps a tear was dashed away as old Jason stumped back. "Hi, is there a Miss Tyson here? There's a gurt thick valentine for her, and I had verra nar carried it up to t' parson's. Oh, it's

thine, Nannie, is it? Tell him to write Nannie Tyson next time, or else thy letters 'll never git to thee." For by this time Jason had recovered his good temper, and considerably lightened his load.

One used always to notice a dispersal of the lasses after Jason had departed. One found a message in the shippon, another in the barn, one upstairs, and another in the cellar dairy. But they all took their valentines with them to gloat over a while in secret. Imagination, or, if you will, love progresses by bounds, so what matter if Jane and Mary got valentines exactly alike? they *knew* who had sent them anyway! Afterwards, equally as a matter of course, the others had to be shown the beautiful love token, and the others had to show as well. Then, at dinner-time, the lads came in and were accused of having received valentines from this one and that—but it was considered more manly to blankly deny such a matter. But all the same the shots occasionally went home. Valentine day was one of sweet smiles, and many a love-sick lad was bewildered at the "niceness" of the girls in kitchen and dairy. (Alas! he was usually only a smiling-post, for the minds of the fair ones were with some ploughman or shepherd far away.) Valentine day was a day of many whispers and much laughter, and one was apt to notice tremendous activity among the lads after milking-time. "Why-a," said Nannie to the hastening Tom, "thou needn't be in sic a sweat. She lives none so far away, and they none milk as early as we do. Tak' time wi'

that bucket." But all the time Nannie was losing no moments, for surely Jock would come down after dark, and wasn't it lucky she'd asked the mistress out for church-night? Mary was not keen about the dark lanes now that her chap was in the Liverpool Police, and as for Nancy, a tryst at the fold gate was pretty certain. "But it was sowan queer as li'le Meg sud ha'e a valentine—she'd only come at Martinmas and said she wasn't seventeen." "I's seventeen now, and ha'e been sin fowerth of December, and I sall suit mysel'," was the lass's pert rejoinder. But how the hours of early evening creep on valentine day, and it seems days before the church bell begins to clap, or before the fold gate rattles and clashes so much in the night breeze that the sheepdogs bark. Says Jane, "Nannie has forgotten to sneck the gate," and she goes on to repair the omission—which proves a considerable job. As to li'le Meg, she is very busy this evening on tasks out in the fold, and some Argus eye, maybe that of Mary, who is sitting peacefully sewing in the ingle-nook, discovers that Meg's valentine was sent by no other than Dan'l, the youngest ploughboy.

Not every valentine of course reached a haven of welcome—the bonnier girls who were still "unattached" got these dainty missives in duplicate or more, and I'm afraid some of our lads did not keep to the accepted rule of sending one valentine only. And thus there were liable to be disagreements on valentine night. Dick from the High House had sent Jane at the Haggs a valentine, and calling

in person in the evening found Jane's attention taken by that red-headed upstart, as was the parson's gardener. Dick, having walked five miles over rugged tracks, was not in good temper, and developed personal feelings against the intruder. It has occurred that a battle was fought in the presence of the fair lady, but it was usual to intrude so pointedly as to render sweet confidences impossible, and fight out the battle somewhere on the homeward way. And maybe on the Sunday Jane was so startled by the altered visages of the cavaliers as to accept the company of another fellow after all.

Looking back over the years one misses the love festival of St. Valentine very sorely. The sending of valentines was a custom which lingered longer in our remotest dales than elsewhere, but it has entirely disappeared now, and to ask at the shops for a valentine is to be met with a blank stare of wonderment. The postman no longer bewails his heavy bag—and is no longer witness of those trembling fingers, that heightened colour, the token of pleasure and true love. Our lads and lasses use comic postcards now.

The real fall of St. Valentine was due to the "skit," a cheap caricature, sometimes of an unpleasant, even offensive nature—a litho cartoon crudely drawn, crudely coloured, and covered with pointed personal allusions. For a few years these skits were a pest—then, like all vulgarities, they passed out of fashion, and alas ! took with them the sweet and amatory valentine. Don't tell me that

the sentiment of the dales lads and lasses has changed—I know different.

(*b*) Some Easter Customs

Of course they are disappearing : in so far as any one but the children are concerned they are gone altogether. But on the Thursday before Good Friday my breakfast-time continues to be disturbed by a mighty noise : a dish-pan chorus done in daylight without any malice or suggestion of tar and feathers. Down the hill a long line of schoolboys are joyously trailing a rope on which seemingly all the decrepit kettles and pans in the village have been strung. And not content with the orgy of discord contrived by dragging the hundred or so of buckets and pans along the macadam, a second gang of boys have armed themselves with clubs and are lustily banging the mass of tins. The whole lot are raising a chorus of " Trot herring, trot horn, Good Friday tomworn." The custom is ancient and unrecorded, unless doubtful phrases here and there in ancient books apply. We know that the people grew heartily weary of the Lenten diet, in which fish was the nearest approach to meat food, and that the end of the fast was always marked by a gorging of animal food. As I read it, the children are rejoicing that the period of meat dinners is at hand : strange in a part of the world where the usages of the Catholic had confessedly little hold at any time. The herring was, and is, the staple fish diet of the

Northern poor, and " horn " needs no explanation. There are curious rules governing the observance. " Git thy breakfast first " is called to any laggard : perhaps so that the pan in which the breakfast fish has been cooked may, in theory, be added to the collection. On no other day than this Thursday must the pans be collected, and any observance of the custom after school hours is deprecated : perhaps in the ideal days the pan had by this time succumbed to rough usage. One cannot think that the custom was Church sanctioned : such rowdiness during hours appointed for the complete and solemn fast would hardly be tolerated. Still, there are the boys, the old, old refrain, the ear-splitting din to remind one of ancient things.

Pace-egging is another Easter custom which is rapidly dying out. Are we getting narrow-hearted when the squire and the squireen of a thousand-acred farm, the other farmers great and small, decline the bounty of a single egg to the children of a depleted countryside ? Our dalesmen may all round be wealthier, but they are no happier than in days when a little openhandedness, at a nominal expense, was practised. As boys we dressed up in weird garments, blackened our faces with soot, donned massive paper hats and went in gangs of five or six to the farms acting (very badly) the traditional play of " King George, a Noble Champion Bold," and receiving willing alms. Nowadays the boys act the play much better, for at great trouble it has been reduced to writing, but they are welcomed

at few places and make no long expeditions, as we did, to high-lying and little-visited farms on the edge of the moor. One has weird recollections of those Eastertide wanderings: of the skies lowering, the thin woods, the whitewashed farms, the cobbled yards, the curtainless window glancing red to the glowing fires within, the collie's challenge. We never waited to be asked: the old kitchens were ample for our stage, and it was our privilege to walk in and get to work at once. "Stir up the fire and strike a light, and see this noble act to-night," would shout our Tospot, our hunchback, and in two minutes King George and his black rival would be slashing at one another with much clanging of hoop-iron swords. After the Moroccan king had been slain his victor had compunction, and called for a doctor. The cast was able to produce old Jacky Brown, who, after a good deal of speechifying of an absurd nature and one or two "mistakes," brings the black monarch back to life and vigour. Old Mally Masket, the boy-feminine who carried the egg-basket, provided a good deal of the comic element, to which our Tospot also contributed. The conclusion of the performance was a very mixed-up song, of traditional style, after which we were at liberty to attack our third or fourth supper. In these days one suffers from indigestion at *so* little.

The eggs so collected at the farms (they were many, and coins were few) were boiled hard and dyed various colours. When Easter came late a

handful of the yellow lily blooms were crushed round the shell in boiling, and the result was a bright saffron egg. When lilies were not available, ivy leaves used in the same way made green shells, or onion peel was utilised to get a variety of brown tones. The golden flowers of the prickly gorse gave a splendid yellow, but nowadays penny dyes of all conceivable shades hold the field. On a Castle hill, outside an old grey town, given the balmy weather Easter Monday should have, one could see anything up to fifteen hundred children playing with coloured eggs. Selecting a smooth span of turf, challenger and acceptor would sit opposite and trundle the eggs so that in mid career they met. Often quite an interval elapsed before one or other scored a square hit—which usually settled the battle, for once cracked the hardest shell easily breaks up. Generally both eggs sustained such damage that it was advisable they should be eaten —and they were. One of my boy friends, whose "jollyboying" eggs were not annexed to family necessities, ate no less than eighteen one afternoon and turned up to tea afterwards!

Easter was the time for traditional fare: on Good Friday they used to eat fig sue in many families, a mess composed of ale boiled with wheaten bread and figs and sweetened with sugar. In my home, however, we only went as far as a good pasty filled with fig fruits. It was, and is, considered wrong to refuse any figs offered on this day—one believes that the cross was formed of this wood.

The blacksmith of our younger days declined to heat iron on Good Friday on any account; he resolutely closed his shop and quitted the parish for the day.

On Easter Sunday we all ate Easter-ledge pudding —not a bad compound if the dresser used only the white and reddish stems (grown below ground) of that farmer's pest, the bistort or snakeweed. The old folks held much virtue in this bitter preparation, which, in spring, was as good as a bottle of medicine, they said, and a flavouring of cecily (sweet bracken) was a recommendation to the pudding.

Of course every one had to have some new garment on Easter Sunday. Otherwise beware of going near a rookery, and in one churchyard every tree had its nests, making the running of the gauntlet an exciting affair. But great is boyish ingenuity: a pair of poor brothers had a new necktie between them, so Jim boldly walked through the trees to the church door armed with it. Then a companion in better situation ran back so that the waiting Bob might not miss church. The same should have been done coming out, but alas! when the organ buzzed all danger was forgotten as we all pelted out on to the fell beyond the church.

(*c*) Curious Funeral Customs

In the quiet hamlets among the Cumbrian fells, where a motor-car other than the doctor's is still a curiosity, may still be found a few quaint survivals

of the funeral customs of a century ago. One cannot, perhaps, give name and place of everything to be mentioned, but as far as possible one will describe those customs actually seen.

First of all, in these regions of fragrant purple heather, the bees had not to be forgotten. As soon as death had entered the house, some one, generally a womanbody in decent black, went to whisper to the busy workers what had occurred, but the bees did not, as in some places, make the mournful occasion excuse for a holiday. The hives were braided with black—as a child I remember seeing a rusty ribbon on the straw skep and asking the reason—and on the funeral day wine and sweet butter were placed in the orchard or garden for the consolation of the bees.

There was always in the household linen chest a winding sheet of pure flax, hand-made, often a real work of art. In this the body was wrapped whether it was that of the mistress or of the meanest farm labourer. In this custom was definite, and " they're nowt of the dow that pick and choose at such a time " was a strong and deterrent condemnation.

Next the " bidding " of neighbours to the funeral. Often the dale was divided into " biddings," and I well remember the carpenter-undertaker's apprentice going from farm to farm and cottage to cottage : " The funeral of [John Thompson] will take place to-morrow [or day after] at three o'clock at the church. To lift at the Haggs at two o'clock. Two from this house are bidden." In other districts, or

in the case of important persons, three might be bidden from each house in the immediate neighbourhood, two from each house in the next district, and one from each in a wider area. It was considered an important duty to be present at every funeral if at all possible, as it was to pay a call at every house where some one was ill. And in "showing friendly" to the sick one never went emptyhanded. The "priest" had also to be informed of the death, but it was not at all usual for him to call until after the funeral. Nor was it *infra dig.* to call in a favourite preacher of funeral sermons to assist in the last rites. "He may have slanted now and then, but for burying a corpse he was undeniable," was frankly said of one clergyman who mixed huntings and burials in joyous inconsequence.

So far as oral tradition goes it has always been the custom for Cumbrian women, except where health did not permit, to attend the last rites. When the body was carried out of the house, and the little procession was formed to go churchwards, it has always been customary to hold a little informal service. Some relative or acceptable friend would offer a short prayer—and very beautiful and appropriate I remember many of those prayers to be—and some favourite hymn sung. Often a bowl of boxwood sprigs would be placed in the porch of the house, and every one was expected to place one in his buttonhole or carry it to the graveside to throw in at the end of the service. Then there was the tray of arvel bread—small loaves specially

baked for the purpose—which were to be carried home and eaten in company with those who could not be present at the funeral. And of course there was the usual distribution of silk scarves to the menfolk of the party—concerning which it used to be stated that the parson's wife at one place wore a silk gown made up of such bits, her husband being in great request on these occasions, and going to far-off parishes by special invitation.

Some of our mountain hamlets are far from the parish church, which has given rise to the " corpse road," which goes straight as a lance to the village centre. I well remember passing along one of these grass-grown corpse roads in company with a veteran : " Aye, this is the road we all must pass, we all must pass, and that right soon." Jobby lived to be ninety-five, and then, as his daughter put it, " dying was a hard fight for him—his heart was that strong though he could neither see nor hear for the last two year." But the official who dared to meddle with the corpse road, even though it might not be used once in twenty years, was in for dire trouble. At stated places it was the custom to halt and sing some favourite psalm or hymn before " lifting " the heavy coffin again.

But there was some difficulty in getting bodies to the distant churchyards. I have seen a body carried for miles across the snow-covered fells on a sledge, and the use of a trap is quite usual in places where a four-wheeled vehicle would be impossible.

On the outside of every township small parties are

waiting for the coming of the funeral—some of the very aged struggle down to the roadside to watch yet another passing on the long journey, others join in the sad procession. At the nearest halting-place to the church the clerk and singers were wont to meet the cortège. This halting-place usually had the name of Cross or Crosses, for it was usually the last and first point at which the parish church in the bottom of the glen was visible. And at a slow pace, singing the quaint funeral hymns, the procession moved on, now in proper order, nearest relatives down to the last possible connection, then the friends in order of age and not of importance. The stone-breaker might precede the squire and no one be a bit the worse. The clergy met the corpse at the lich-gate, and then the beautiful service for interring the dead was recited. How plaintive the words, how joyous the noble promises, how hushed the barn-like interiors of the plain stone churches; how one heard the breeze moaning through the dark yew trees and heard the whispering of the beck on its shingles at the foot of the garth.

After the funeral, it was and is customary to offer refreshment to all attenders—and as some of these may have come twenty miles across the fells with as far to return, a pretty substantial meal is the result. All the one-time dainties, with the exception of sweet butter, have gone into the limbo of past things, and the funeral feast has lost much of its character.

(*d*) Guy Fawkes' Day

It was a good custom indeed of our village life that if a boy wanted anything, whether it was a firework, or a sledge, or a fishing-rod, his only way to obtain it was to make it. We had no shops stocked with all sorts of short cuts to pleasure, and coin was a curiosity to most of us. Therefore, when we wanted to celebrate the fifth of November it was up to us to provide fuel for the bonfire, and the fireworks. What days of weird compounding we passed in order to get an explosive mixture of sulphur, charcoal and saltpetre. The ingredients had to be earned or begged from the farmers—they were of the quality used in cattle food and medicine. Iron filings for " sparks " were always available at the smithy—there might be even a small, useless bit of steel which boyish hands might file down to a pile of glittering dust. Our cannon were very primitive indeed—nothing more than a nut and a loose-fitting bolt. The " powder " was piled in the orifice in the nut, the bolt put on, then it was an exhilarating duty for some one to tip a big stone on to the top of the bolt. Bang ! (If there was any explosion at all.) Then we went to pick up the pieces of the engine. Not infrequently a too-zealous pile of explosive had sent the bolt sky-high, and there was woe in the camp. In after life one often wonders at the hair-breadth escapes of earlier years. I remember being almost deafened by the discharge of a nut just as I turned a corner in the school-

ground; my cap was torn off and went sailing several yards. Later investigation showed that the bolt had risen sidewise, and had torn a jagged hole through my head-gear as it passed away into the unknown. Another time, three of us were compounding "gunpowder" in a discarded saucepan when it went off, singeing our eyebrows and lashes so neatly away that for several days we were school heroes, and liked it. When sulphur, charcoal and saltpetre get to a certain stage of mixing they are excessively dangerous, but such trifles did not trouble us. Of course, we never let the chance of a loaded cartridge go past, and the keeper was not happy for a while if he left his powder-flask—he used a muzzle-loader—within reach of the boys. After every shoot in the vicinity there was a careful passing over the ground, and if a cartridge were found there was great joy. I have seen three of these drying on a stone set in the midst of a fire, but there was no accident to report. To-day one feels nervous if the cartridge bag is brought within a couple of yards of a fire. When a cartridge was found it had, of course, to be unloaded if no means of drying were available, and a jagged pocket-knife was just the thing to cut away the wad and decant the contents of the case. Next some one had to fire the cap—have you ever tried it? A heavy hammer was brought, and we had turns at striking until there was a bang from the flattened copper end. The long caps used at the quarries were just the thing we wanted—a big flash, a loud

bang, the hammer sent backwards from our hands, and a white place on the stone where the explosion had taken place.

But our first duty on Guy Fawkes' Day, in those days the boys' great festival, was to collect enough material to make a decent bonfire. There was enough stuff within reach—of a sort. Armed with bill-hooks, axes, even an old carving-knife was not to be despised, we set off in the early afternoon up the lane to where whins and brackens grew luxuriantly. How busy we were ! The big bushes had to be hacked down, then the youngest were sent back to the hamlet dragging them, a willing team. The elders cut the shorter stuff and the bracken, and muck-barrow and sled were loaded up. It has always been a surprise to me how much burnable stuff a small horde of boys were able to get together in an afternoon.

But whins and bracken, though they will blaze fiercely, do not last well nor burn evenly, so the next expedition was along the wreck-line of our swift-flowing and oft-flooded river. Here many a heavy, partly dry bough, short piece of railing, even tree root was to be found, and all within a mile were sure of inspection, if not collection. Then there was a pile of dry wood to get, for which sometimes we went as far afield as the old bobbin mill, now alas ! an industry of the past in our dale. The joiner's shop provided shavings ; and now we were well equipped. How was it that darkness was never complete for hours after sunset on a fifth of

November? The pile of loose material had to go under the transforming touch of our elders, who managed, for the bairns' sake, to make a presentable bonfire of it. The shavings and the dry wood were built into a central cone. The brackens were laid in a rough bed, then the whins, the small branches, the drift-wood and, finally, the heavy roots and whatnot we had got together. At last came the time for lighting. I can see even now a bonfire many a year ago—the old carpenter and his eldest son walking round with candles lighting every corner that seemed likely, the slight blaze, the dying away, the call for some paraffin, the sudden glare as a gout of this caught in the sulking fire, then the rapidly rising shafts of flame, and the roar as the first long tongue licked its way up to the top of the pile and out into the air. At that moment it was good to live, and even the sternest parent, uncle or aunt became human and a friend. "Noo, lads, whar's ye'er fire-warks?" Old Jack, the joiner, called, and shyly, Tom the elder brought into light a portentous squib. We boys all knew it well, had seen the construction of the paper tube, the fixing of the wooden bottom, the filling with powder, compounded of sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal, had seen a plenteous sprinkling of steel filings, a few crumbs of salt and sugar and resin at intervals, had noted the fuse carefully led down to the bottom of the explosive pile. We had seen, had helped, had wondered—and now was to come a realisation. It came with a vengeance! Old Jack placed the

squib on the ground, touched it gently with his candle flame, there was a faint " siss "—then crash ! Red and white and blue fire seemed to streak the heavens—Tom's carefully compounded squib had elected to explode in one bang instead of drawing out its delight over several minutes. I do not remember what Old Jack (rest his soul, he was a thorough good fellow !) said—but he approached the next firework in a more chastened spirit. This one was supposed to be a jumping cracker—and was. Your modern jumping cracker is a fraud; frap, frap, frap it goes a dozen times in a few seconds and then is spent. Our cracker was a gentleman; when the candle touched it there was the usual faint " siss," then a loud crack, and half the boys were searching for its remains. There was a hurried rush this way and that. " Ah's sure it com ower here " at all points of the compass except one—behind a bunch of young women. What a crack, what a yell, what a laugh, and the jumping cracker had gone off to sleep awhile in some other unexpected corner. Old Jack did not believe in wasting fireworks, and waited until that cracker had gone its tenth time before he consented to fire off his son Bill's newfangled cannon. Had Old Jack had a better idea of what explosives can do he would have given that piece of rusty iron pipe let into a socket of bone a wide berth, but—he did not. The candle flame dipped, there was a little spout of light from the touch-hole and then a bang—and a yell. Bill's intentions to hold the cannon were

stronger than his thumb, and there was demand for rough-and-ready ambulance work to get his thumb into place again. I have known the breech of one of these terrible weapons blown off, and bursts by the dozen, but never any accident worse than Bill's jumped thumb.

(*e*) Christmas Music

Like all who live in mountain or solitary places the dalesfolk are passionately fond of music, though their quiet reserve might send a stranger to a different conclusion. The dalesman, being of Norse or Saxon blood, has not the ecstatic aptitude of the Celt for this art, and so there are few airs which he can really claim for his own. Almost any dale on the Scottish border can show a series of better tunes than the whole of the Lake Country. A great love for music has even been a sort of offence among the stock which Canon Robertson has described as "Nature's Quietists." A musical career is still looked upon by old-fashioned folk as the most deplorable vagabondage. Here and there, amid such unfavourable surroundings, one finds men gifted with natural ability for music on the fiddle, the typical musical instrument of the Lakeland. One must now accept the fact that the old type of wandering fiddler has gone to his rest. There are no longer Old Tims wandering half-fuddled from sheep-shearing to shepherds' meet, from dancing-class to hunt ball, from the coming-of-age to the wedding,

and even from the rush-bearing to the Christmas festival in the village church itself.

Tyson Walker hailed me as his trap approached the cross-roads on the snow-covered common, and I dismounted to "hear his will." "We're having a bit of a stir at our place to-morrow night—what, you must come up, however." As one cares nothing for dancing or cards, the dales indoor winter amusements, one is tempted to decline, but a sense of neighbourliness takes one again and again to these functions. Tyson, moreover, is a generous host, and a stickler for old-time practices.

The old farmer had had the great outer kitchen cleared of churns and bins and bags of various meals so that the dancers might have sufficient room, and it was to this apartment that we all adjourned after a late tea. Four fiddlers there were, ready and waiting to begin, but the young folks were shy as yet, and a good deal of laughing and banter failed to make a couple "take the floor." At this Tyson affected wrath. "Now, Bob, strike us up a three-reel, and Mary and Reuben and myself will show them how to make a start." Of course, Mary hadn't danced for thirty years, and it wasn't comely for a widow to be doing such things. But Tyson simply hauled her, not unwilling, out to her place, and Reuben, ninety and lish at that, needed no further persuasion. The fiddlers struck up a merry air and the fun commenced. There is a great deal of ceremonial about the three-reel, the men bow and bend, the lady curtseys, they change places, swing

this way and that, all the while keeping perfect time with their steps. Reuben soon tired, and another nearly as ancient took his place without a word, then Tyson complained that his rheumatic leg hurt him, and he was out of it. But the game widow, who might have had her old-age pension a dozen years ago, stood up to her new partners and wore them out in succession. She was going as strong as ever when the minstrels stopped for a short rest. "By gow, Mary, thou's as lish as ever. Does thee mind that rush-bearing when thee and your Jim and our Joe danced away from eleven o'clock until the parson sent his butler in at a quarter to twelve to borrow the fiddler's bow?" (This was actually the tactful old clergyman's manner of reminding his flock in their gaiety that the Sabbath was near.)

After this opening there was less shyness among the young ones, especially as the elder end gradually trailed off into the inner kitchen to play at cards or to talk in the fire-nook. For myself I watched awhile the sprightly evolutions—the dancing-class was in full swing and one or two of the newest things were to be tried. Whether they were or not one cannot, from sheer ignorance, tell. The fiddlers, working three at a time now, took my attention. The leader was a grey old quarryman who had fiddled at everything of importance in the dale for at least half a century, and with him were two of his grown-up sons. The fourth musician was also of the family-party, having married the senior fiddler's daughter. Their music was at first a great

disappointment. After the old three-reel tune had been disposed of, there seemed to be a succession of music-hall ditties with airs from the piano-organs of the town—with, of course, a few favourite waltz- and other dance-pieces of the modern order. Then I came face to face with a curious fact. None of the fiddlers could read a bar of printed music. Their work was all from memory, and wondrously well-stored these must have been. Even when the old man struck into the rarely used three-reel music the others chimed in without hesitancy. There was nothing that they had heard that they could not play—even to a certain number of phrases from a famous "Dead March," which they welded some way into a waltz-tune later in the evening. The music seemed successful, for the dancers followed it without any trouble at all.

At supper, the old fiddler sat next to me and favoured me with some recollections of old-time dancing. "It's nothing at all, lad, to what it used to be. That waltz, easy as muck, has killed out all the good old dances as well as the good tunes. What would I give to see a really good eight-reel again, like we used to have after the 'Taty Pie Hunt'! But there isn't eight folk left in the dale that could join in it, and I misdoubt if I could bring back enough of the old tune to make it go. When I was young there used to be great dances, and everybody in the dale joined in. I don't think we're any better off now that not half the young folk go in for dancing at all. Why, Tyson's wash-kitchen could

not hold all the folk here if they were keen dancers. There's some as haven't even looked in at the music at all. There used to be the frog-step—there isn't a body in the dale that can do it for three minutes on end. But that wants practice, I can tell you. Until I hurt my leg ten years back I used to do it at times to show folk, but nobody seemed to care to learn it. Hey, Tyson, can any of your lads do a frog-step?" "Well now, I'm not sure, but I found two or three of them trying it last Sunday afternoon atween whiles with their wrestling. We might get one of them on after supper when the lads and lasses come in here."

About nine o'clock another musician arrived—the tall, lanky lad who "mastered" the band at the village and was the boast of the dale as a cornet player. With his help the volume of sound gained, but he was obviously ill at ease. In one interval I got into conversation. "Playing? Why, it's something terrible. I'm frightened every minute I'll break down or make a mess of it. It's all right as long as we're on with stuff that I know, but these fellows, why, they trail off after their father into whatever tune he strikes up—and a good many of them I've never heard before. Did you hear them break in on this?"—and he hummed a stave which I recognised as belonging to a sentimental song of my earliest recollection—"why, I simply had to keep on playing bugle calls quietly until I guessed partly where they were, and then vamped it out so that we all came in at the finish together."

Certainly the bandmaster's red visage showed that the fiddlers were giving him some work. "But I say, aren't they marvels? They know every tune that's been whistled or sung here for the last fifty years at least."

After a while the promised exhibition of the frog-step came off—at least one of the farm lads, encouraged by the laughter of his friends, made a few of those exhausting hops, then rolled over on the floor breathless. The old fiddler was furious: "Just when I was putting on a new string so as to give thee a good tune." The card-tables offered me no pleasures, so I sat down to hear some of Old Reuben's tales of his young days. He would, however, persist in arguing that the Polled Herdwick was not as good a sheep as the ancient breed which it has displaced, and as he never finished off any theory the whole fabric of opinion came down in a tangle. But Tyson, who had just finished supper, came to the rescue. "I say, Reuben, what used you to do for music at church in the old days?" "Why, hadn't we a proper fiddlers' gallery up there opposite the pulpit which you churchwardens pulled down twenty years since. There was Joe Moffat as used to play the big fiddle, and Tom and Bill Wills had little fiddles. And there was some singing, for the young ones didn't like to stand mum in those days, and there was no choir. I mind well one Christmas morning—Christmas Day was on a Monday—when some young scamps got into church early and wetted all the fiddle strings, for both

fiddles and strings had been kept in the church overnight. There was a row, but they were never found out. Another break [joke] was to buzz like a mad wasp. Joe Moffat was awful frightened of wasps, and summer and winter alike he was taken in. It was rare sport to see him looking about for the little wasp as anxious as could be. One Christmas morning he found out who it was that made the noise, and let go at me with his bow, breaking it to bits and making the parson so mad that he preached him from the pulpit."

The old fiddler had few stories to recall—he was most upset at the demand for written music, stoutly averring that anything worth remembering could be remembered easy enough. " Playing at Christmas —it's not wanted now. But I well remember when my father used to take me up into the belfry to play to the ringers when they were doing the Christmas chimes. Those days are gone now." Bob had known a great many of the old-time fiddlers, who, on their tramps about the country, never failed to call on his father. " I remember well one snowy day—at least it had been snowing—when Old Tim came down the road to our house and said that he had a new sort of music chap with him. And he brought in a bagpiper. What a skirling row he made to be sure—a fiddle can do gayly well, but it isn't in it with the bags. That was the first time I heard the pipes. The same night nothing would suit my father but that he and Tim and the piper must walk down to the town and back, playing all the

way. And I'll never forget the sounds, getting finer and sweeter in the distance, then all going quiet for a minute; then a little sweep of wind brought back most of the music, and then lown'd and quiet again. And their coming back was just as bonny. They had never stopped step from our house to the market cross and back—and there were a conny few public-houses in the way then."

YARNS OF THE OLD-TIME

(*a*) Shrovetide Ways

In old times in the dales Shrovetide was somewhat of a festival—the Tuesday was a day for weddings, for cock-fighting, for feasting on rich pancakes, for all the animal fat in the houses had to be used up before the Lenten fast began. The weddings were also sort of perforce, for many of our old priests (the Reformation made no difference to the common title of the clergy in our wild Northern dales) would not undertake a marriage service during Lent. Though to be sure some of the poorer brethren were delighted, by the offer of double fees, to make exceptions when opportunity arose. The cock-fighting, after being the pleasure of the Court, deteriorated until finally forbidden by law, and, so far as our childhood was concerned, there was an end of it. But aged grandfathers used to tell us that there was a strong connection between cock-fighting, Shrove-Tuesday, and the school.

How those ancients used to gloat over descriptions of Shrovetides past and gone—and incidentally tempt us into bending darning needles, fastening them to collars of thin wood, and pitting Jack's

Game Bantam against all comers (to wit, Amos's Old Brahma). The battle was short and ended in tears—for us, as our illegal proceedings were spied upon and denounced as cruel. I'm certainly afraid that our birds were in more danger from their own unaccustomed spurs than any gage or shift of the battle. But to return to our ancient tale.

In our old dale schools the master received so much per quarter (fixed by endowment deed often at sixpence for pettys and a shilling for Latins), with the addition of a cockpenny on Shrove-Tuesday. This gratuity was not really a fixed amount, and varied according to the circumstances of the scholar. The schoolmaster arrived on Shrove-Tuesday morning to find his school in an uproar. The boys were seated wearing their caps, and hailed him with a wild cheer of "Dux, Dux." Next he gathered, from their caps, his gratuity, and led the way to the cockpit. Here he was installed as umpire, while the lads produced the birds for battle. Keeping birds in trim and heeled for service was an expensive hobby, so it was usual for the boys to elect two of their number, usually of the "bettermer mak," to be rival captains and to produce four or eight birds to constitute the main. The owner of the winning team of birds was hailed captain of the school for the coming year, and much praised.

It is not considered good form to repeat these old-time descriptions of cock-fighting: in fact, to do so fully would argue that the narrator himself has not unlikely personally shared in a cock-fight.

However, let the conclusion be what it may, here is old Eli's tale. "Why then, oot we went as if t'Ahld Lad hissel wor efter us, an' ower t'kirkyard wall, and into Tom Maylor's orchard, where there was ever a cockpit big eneuf for anybody. Jim Woods was captain oor side o't'Beck, and Gimmer—that was wha?—oh, Tom Bales was t'other. Oot come the first two birds, catch-weights as ever was, an' t' lang spurs were slipped on an' strapped. T' scheulie, he sed 'Noo,' and the birds wer' dropped. They worn't varra keen at first, but first yan and than t' udder began to craa-a an' to hector, an' aw at yance they sooart o' seed yan anudder, an' there was a bonny set-to. Roonds—why-a, we never h'ard o' sic things. They went at yan anudder as lang as they could stand, an' than, what, they just lay doon an' tifted. By gum, it wor funny to see they liggin' just aboot dee-ad an' still trying to call an' hector. Than first yan and than t' udder wod wemmle on to its feet an' they wod begin again. At last oor cock gat in a gurt loup, an' cot t' udder down as dee-ad as a nit. An' we shooted, didn't we? But t'next main was agen us, an' we poo'ed lang faces, for our last two birds worn't good. But somehow or other we managed to get three wins, and oor man was t' scheul champion again."

One can trace in parish accounts that cock-fighting had been a Shrovetide amusement for at least three hundred years—of course it is one of the world's most ancient sports, common to every country and kin except the most barbaric. Its

rules were settled by kings and princes; there was a language of cock-fighting as there was of hunting and fishing and chivalry—and a century ago the battle of birds was considered an object lesson in national loyalty and courage. Long before the Shrovetide mains were entirely forbidden by law, the better class of dalesfolk (morally, perhaps not financially) were antagonistic, and to be called a "cocker" was the reverse of a compliment even in the days of Robert Burns.

Among the greatest Northern enthusiasts of his day was the "Christopher North" of "Noctes Ambrosianæ" fame, a genial contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, and, as a philosopher, Professor Wilson of Edinburgh University. During his holidays at Lake Windermere, the Professor was frequently to be met on his walks with a gamecock spurred for battle under his arm. "Christopher North's" diaries show his keenness, and between some beautiful stanzas of his "Isle of Palms" are jottings concerning the welfare and prowess of his fighting birds. "In one of the MS. books containing the principal portions of 'The Isle of Palms' I find many of these quaint entries in most eccentric juxtaposition to notes of a very different kind. Along with calculations of the number of lines to be allotted to various proposed poems, such as 'St. Hubert,' 'The Manse,' 'The Ocean Queen,' there are elaborate memoranda of the 'broods proposed for next spring.'" And one person recollected for years "a main of cocks being

fought in the drawing-room at Elleray, before the flooring was laid down, and its being covered with sods for this occasion. The rival competitors were Mr. Wilson and Mr. Richard Watson. All the neighbouring farmers were invited, and, after the sport, entertained at a genteel supper. Wilson was the victor, and won a handsome silver drinking cup, bearing an inscription, with date, etc."

In some of our older districts, the prize for winning the Shrovetide main was a silver bell, which was put into the cap of the victorious captain.

Our own Shrovetides were much less exciting. There was the dinner of batter pancakes, thin and brown, and liberally dusted with sugar, and afterwards a raid on the daffodils or the primroses in the coppices up the river. In a neighbouring village there was ever a hare hunt on Shrove-Tuesday—substituted by the priest of long ago for the old cock-fighting main—and as we grew able to travel there we went, often without the formality of asking leave; and wasn't there trouble when the schoolmaster omitted to grant the accustomed half-holiday! He didn't get so many big lads at any rate that afternoon, and the three hours' coaching for the coming examinations fell on rather heedless ears. But we did not dare resent his authority beyond a little ironic cheer as we scattered for home.

(*b*) On Barring Out: as Told by a Council of Ancients

During July "speech-days," with a more or less successful Old Boy or magnate to present the prizes, are the rule in the scholastic world. Such occasions, carefully organised by the school proprietors, may make a small stir, impress parents, and be an advertisement of the school's merits, but one is absolutely certain that they do not reach the savage inner nature of the genus schoolboy nearly so well as did the old-time barring out of the schoolmaster prior to the holidays.

Why, I believe it would be possible for every one of us to recall in detail and separately each occasion, from the first we saw as newly inducted "infants" to the last, at which we felt we were the moving spirit. Nowadays the date and duration of elementary school holidays is solemnly fixed by the Education Authorities, and announced weeks beforehand, but in our time the first fine Thursday after the big meadow outside the school was cut was the date fixed upon for a rebellion. Soon after the master had gone to dinner the door was bolted and locked, and how tardy was his return! At five minutes to one he would stroll into the school yard, look amazed at its unwonted quietude, and, still puzzling, stop to draw out his big watch with the gold seals. Having leisurely consulted this he came up to the school door and tried the sneck. A pen handle or a slate pencil had secured this, and the

old man tried again. Inside the school was silence, broken only by the nervous tittering of the girls and maybe the suppressed sobs of the scared "babies." "Open that door at once," called the master, "I know you aren't all truanting." There was no reply—there was a very stringent code in regard to this, and the old man knew it well. "James Thompson, open that door or I'll warm you." Still no reply. "What do you want by fastening the school door? I'll *stick* the lot of you, and give you double tasks." Now was the time to chant our chorus: "Six weeks' holiday and no tasks"—at which the old man simulated much fury. "I'll give you no holidays at all, and double tasks if you don't open that door at once." And again we chorused our just demands. "Let me in, and I'll see about it." But the door was held. "I'll give you a week's holiday if you'll be good lads and lasses" was equally scorned as a concession. "If you don't open that door, I'll just bring some of your fathers to see what bad lads you are." But still we kept the door locked, and at length the old man, threatening unutterable things, went off to bring a choice selection of fathers to wallop us into obedience.

His retirement was the signal for our next action: across the big meadow (I saw it to-day—it has shrunk to less than two hundred yards wide, but was once a mile at least) was a wood, and the time-honoured ritual of "barring out" now demanded that we should break bounds for this cover, once within which

it was hopeless for the schoolmaster to recapture us. So out in due time we sallied, every big one dragging a little boy or girl as fast as their little legs could go. If the master caught any of us before the wood was reached, then the holiday was forfeit. And sure enough there he is in pursuit—run, run. For his threat to bring down parental wrath was merely a ruse, and he has got into the school by the back door, only waited to snatch up his stick, and is coming fast. Woe fare the boy that is captured (for, after the schoolmaster has finished with him, we will all and several give him a good hiding for his laziness)—girls don't count. But ah! one remembers that the schoolmaster reckoned his distance and pace so well that none were captured, though it might be that some terrified "infant" had tripped in the hay and lay there, howling terribly. If such a disaster occurred, the old man was equal to the occasion. "Never mind, Jimmy, it's only the big lads I'm after. I'll warm them." By the time he reached the edge of the wood, his little flock was scattered far and wide therein, singing joyfully, "Four weeks' holiday and no tasks," for to that our demand had been whittled down. After a while the old man marched back to the school, and, standing on the doorstep, produced the whistle which was our usual call to assembly, and, knowing that the victory was ours, there was an answering stampede schoolwards. The old man was at his desk, and as soon as the shuffling and seating was over, simply announced that the school

would be closed for four weeks and that we could go at once. No mention of tasks anywhere! Hip-pip-hooray, as we vulgar little boys would have it.

Our school was always peaceful in its "barrings out," but there are stories of very lively times indeed at other places. At one school the boys got all the buckets and barrels available filled with dirty water, and with a battery of home-made squirts (a joint of the giant water hemlock with a stick and a bit of cloth makes quite an effective weapon) completely drenched the master. Sometimes an unpleasant booby-trap was sprung at the outer door, and in other places big unruly lads hustled the master out of doors without much ceremony. In those days children in our Northern dales did not start school until they were about eight years old, and the boys stayed there until they were quite giants of seventeen.

There was something in this "barring out" of the master prior to the summer holidays which appealed to the lawless nature of boyhood, but now those days are gone. No longer is the master the autocrat of his village school, but a smug commonplace committee, sitting somewhere round the corner, orders him and his work down to the dullest point of dullness.

(*c*) The Need-Fire

Some months ago, looking from Penrith Beacon over the Vale of Eden, one's eyes turned to the

columns of smoke rising to form a pall over the farms where an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease had called for resolute measures. Every animal on the farms was condemned to the slaughter, and then to be cremated, while fire was laid to the grass and the crops in the fields. In talk with the old men of that vale, and of many a mountain glen, references were perpetually made to the need-fire which of old was held to be efficacious against all cattle evils. The need-fire is a superstition of old standing; in 742 the usage was forbidden to all Christians by a canon of the Church. The first record in Cumberland, and apparently in Britain, of its use is in the *Chronicon de Lanercost*, written in Latin, about the year 1268. This entry shows that certain men, monkish in garb but bestial in spirit, had initiated the need-fire along with certain heathen rites among the peasants as an antidote to epidemical diseases prevailing among their cattle. From that time until the beginning of the nineteenth century the usage survived with more or less vigour; indeed, Sullivan says that the raising of the new, or need-fire, was an annual custom associated with Midsummer Day.

The last batch of instances in which the need-fire was publicly lit were in connection with outbreaks of murrain, or foot-and-mouth disease, in 1834, according to the contemporary accounts of the *Carlisle Patriot;* in 1840, according to Dickinson's *Cumbriana*, a writer in which occupied a farm in Cumberland at the time, and had his herd unwillingly put through

the fire and smoke; in 1841, near Keswick, according to Wilson; in 1843–4 at Longmarton, in Westmorland. In Troutbeck, however, the fire was lit at intervals up to 1851, the natives apparently believing with Stow that a great fire "purges the infection of the air." It is a matter of argument whether isolated uses of the need-fire have not occurred since that date; that there has been some temptation may be judged from the statement of a dales parson that within the past forty years he had been privately asked whether the lighting of a need-fire and the passing of cattle through the smoke was really wicked. He had recourse to the canon of A.D. 742 in reply, but had to add that acrid smoke was considered to be of assistance in certain temporary lung ailments. It is still a practice in some parts of the North to make children inhale fumes from a gas retort, or from dowsed coal ashes, as a sovereign remedy for whooping-cough.

The kindling of the need-fire was always marked by certain formalities. It was always imperative that every fire in the dale or countryside should be quenched, and that the point at which the new fire was to be raised should be to the eastward, so that it could always be passed on in the direction of the sun. On the last occasion it was raised in Troutbeck; the new fire was first delivered at the uppermost farm in the dale, after which, by means of kindled peats, it was passed to every farm in the valley. This was in the year 1851. In most districts, the wildfire, to be efficacious, had to be

produced from dry sticks which had never been under cover; but in Troutbeck, where the fire was most regularly used, some genius had made short work of the heavy labour the other method involved and introduced friction by means of a spinning-wheel.

Once raised, the fire was passed from farm to farm as rapidly as possible, but in most places it was not proper to send for the fire; it must come without request and be passed on without fee or reward. At the farm, a pile of suitable material had been brought together, chiefly weeds, brambles, brackens, old thatch, carefully damped down so that a great reek was certain. Nothing that had been under a roof could be used; wildfire it came, and wildfire it must remain. There is a record, or tradition, that in the Appleby district nothing but barley straw was considered proper for this purpose. All the stock on the farm was assembled and in turn driven through the smoke-wreaths. There is no record that our Northern farmers observed the order of procedure, as did their Continental brethren, who sent in horses, cows, sheep, and pigs in their proper order; but it is on record that a Troutbeck farmer, after sending all his stock through the smoke, brought out his ailing wife, who also went through the ordeal.

There is, however, a certain undertone of conviction among the old men that one has drawn into conversation on the subject, that there is something "wise-like" in using the wildfire, and frankly

one is far from believing that half a century has passed since the flame so named was produced by the will of man, and its smoke used as a precaution against disease. "Why do you call it 'need-fire'?" was asked of an Appleby woman in the days of long ago. "Because it comes when we need it," was her prompt reply. The modern method of stamping out contagious disease by wholesale cremations of stock and crop is an exceedingly effective successor of the much-fabled "need-fire," but there is a stoical philosophy among the vale and mountain dwellers which attributes all bad things to the eastward—the quarter of bad weather in summer and winter, and if the need-fire came in a time of disease over the Stainmore passes, there are places where it would be hailed as a boon.

(*d*) Some Old-Time Giants

Scores of times I have sat in the circle round a peat fire at the loneliest houses among our fells, and listened to stories wild and weird as the storm howled and the rain and snow rattled without. Of the old-time tales told at such times several deal with the giants: "And in those days there were giants in the land, as is written in the Holy Book," said Old John mildly and finally one evening, when a pert lad questioned the possibility of the whole thing. The stories are, as told, a curious medley of historical and mythological, and would bear analysis from that point of view. But one is more interested

in them as literal and entertaining, just saying that every man of note in dales story is remarkable for the size of his bones and the use of his sinews. Our fellsfolk had little use for subtlety, unless it were to cheat the Devil of his due, or of his claims.

All giants were outcasts, and in a general way sinister. They were not by any means beauties. Uther Pendragon, father of the famous King Arthur, is perhaps the most ancient of our giants. He founded the kingdom in the wilds of Mallerstang which his son extended from Yorkshire right up to the Highlands. He was a fearsome tyrant, cannibalistic, heathen, and occupied spare hours by trying to divert the river Eden so that it should form an effective moat to lonesome Pendragon Castle. "But," said the wise man of the dale—

> "Let Uther Pendragon do what he can,
> Eden shall run as Eden ran."

And it did. Few wished Uther well in his attempt to get undisputable command of the travellers' way between Carlisle and York. Uther's end was not peace—no queens in trailing black conducted his soul in their barge across the River of Death unto the Isles of the Blessed—and on wild winter nights you may meet him galloping over Orton Scar and away to Shap Fell.

Further down the Eden valley about the same period lived Owen Cæsarius, a mighty warrior who apparently kept a commodious suite of caves near Eden Hall for the entertainment of "the

captives of his bow and spear." He used no enchantment to keep them there, preferring huge iron doors, the hinge-bolts of which are still to be seen. Owen died in the odour of sanctity, and the old tales name the great grave in Penrith churchyard as his. He must have been an awkward customer in life, for his grave measures about seventeen feet long and is less than three feet wide. Fame does not tell whether Owen fought for Scots or English, or whether he went strictly on his own—one supposes the latter, for a freebooter was ever loved by his dependents. Owen's pleasure was in the chase, and wolves and bears were as rabbits and hares to him. Even the wild boar at bay was no terror.

But the place above all for giants was Troutbeck, a short dale which strikes up from the eastern shore of Windermere Lake to its head in Kentmere High Street. The Troutbeck giants were such mighty fellows that other dales have borrowed (or annexed) some of their fame, for the Cork Lad of Kentmere was Hugh Hird of Troutbeck, and Will of the Tarns in Yewdale was another from the same dale. Tom Hickathrift was a third—he wandered in many dales and left his bones in many places. Maybe history has duplicated or even triplicated him, and left enough and to spare.

The legend of Hugh Hird is the most persistent of the lot, so let me give the elements of his story first. Hugh's mother had been a nun at Furness Abbey, but when the Dissolution came she wandered into the land of the fells, then wild and desolate

indeed. Hugh's father is unnamed, and prior to her delivery of this great son she wandered through the woods which then covered Troutbeck Park, a rocky knott at the head of the dale. Hereabout was Hugh born. Early in life he showed great strength. The Gilpins were rebuilding Kentmere Hall, and the great rannel balk had for a whole morning defied the efforts of twelve men to raise it into place. At noon, while the workers were away eating and resting, Hugh came over the pass, and seeing the thirty-foot beam lying about he lifted it to its place unaided. No one in Westmorland, then the land of strong men, could stand up to Hugh in the wrestling ring or compete with him at the butts, for a shot of a mile was nothing to so powerful an archer. Hird's fame went afar, even to London, and Edward VI ordered that the strong man should appear at Court. There he was matched with a champion wrestler, but he, on seeing his opponent's massive frame and huge muscles, thought the better part of valour was discretion and departed hurriedly. Another man was, however, found bold enough to venture. The two got to grips, and Hugh immediately sent his man spinning to earth. But the other claimed that he was not rightly felled, so Hugh prepared for another tussle. This was even shorter, and the Southerner lay stretched with a broken spine. "Is that good eneuf?" asked Hird. Then in archery the King's bodyguard showed their skill, but on being presented with their strongest bow Hugh pulled it back so far that the tough yew

snapped like straw. Indeed two stout staves bound together were hardly enough, and the arrows of the Troutbeck man flew far and straight, piercing clean through the targets in which the others had stuck. Now the King must needs have the new champion brought before him, and one of his first questions was concerning the diet on which such power was sustained. Hugh's reply was that he got for breakfast thick porridge on which a mouse might walk dryshod, and for dinner the sunny side of a wether—when he could get it. The term "sunny side" puzzled the Court (and has puzzled many clever people since), but it is quite in ordinary use in our dales to-day to mean something more than half of the matter in question. For his prowess Hugh Hird was granted the whole of Troutbeck Park, then a worthless hill vested in the King, and it is said that he came by his death at the early age of forty through overstrain in clearing his possession. Hugh had no axe, so pulled up the giant oaks by their roots—a laborious business when they were fast anchored in the crags. Hugh was a bit of use to his native dale, protecting them against the foraying Scots on so many occasions that for generations the clans elected not to venture Troutbeck way lest some descendant of Hugh's should fancy shooting at them from a mile away with wooden rails for arrows, or slinging big boulders with unerring aim from the like distance.

Whether Will of the Tarns was of the Hird stock legend does not say, but he lived not long after Hugh,

and it may be that Troutbeck had had troubles with the giant family and sent them away beyond Windermere Water into exile. Will had nothing of geniality about him. He lived in the wilds, and not even Le Fleming of Coniston, with his eight stalwart sons, dare summon him for any misdeed. He was a great billman, and always joined in the battles between the Furness men and marauding Scots and Irish. Will, after a lively life, came to his end in a tragic fashion. Eva Le Fleming, a noted beauty, was wont to pass near the giant's haunt on her journeys between the family seats at Rydal and Coniston, and for her the giant had a passionate longing. So one night he attempted to capture her, but her palfrey outdistanced him, and Will had to be content with seizing her servant, Barbara. Either love in him was blind, or he suffered from defective vision in the gloaming, as do many motorists of to-day. Eva raised the alarm at Coniston Hall, and soon Yewdale was " wick and alive " with knights and their retainers. Dick Hawksley, the falconer, by virtue of starting at once and without armour, led the chase on foot and came up with the slow-moving giant at Cauldron Dub. The giant, now pressed hard by the horsemen, flung his fair burden into the flooded stream ; her lover leapt to her aid, but neither could be got ashore, and at dawn the bodies, locked together in a last embrace, were found in Coniston Lake. The men-at-arms meanwhile brought the giant to a stand, and though he made great play with his club, he was soon stretched upon the grass with

blood running like so many rivers from a hundred wounds.

Tom Hickathrift is of more ancient origin apparently: a Troutbeck giant with something amiable in his composition, a man willing to argue so long as his great club was in his hand, a village Hampden who, when roused by the tyrannies of petty squires, seems to have run amok and made very nasty trouble. He is buried in many parishes—not like Great Will, whose burial cairn is quite close to the Yewdale Road—and even under different names. Such is fame.

YARNS OF SUPERSTITION

(*a*) Taistrels, Barghaists and Others

Sometimes, when the evenings begin to draw in, one is caught in a retrospective mood and can recall old times and old stories—can picture again the ancient women and white-haired patriarchs of the dale telling weird tales of their youth and of the greater days of old. We youngsters used to repeat these stories to each other in bed until some one was afraid to go to sleep. Old Michael Scott—what an appropriate name—had a wonderful store of the mysterious and the calamitous: he told endless yarns of ghosts and "flays," of taistrels and barghaists, of fairies and even of the Devil. If half Michael's tales had any foundation in fact, then our fair county at some time must have been a happy ground for his Satanic Majesty.

The Devil built bridges, and proved a bad hand at a bargain. Two market women were deploring their luck at finding the river in flood and wished for a bridge, a newfangled thing in these parts in those days. "I wouldn't care if the Devil himself built it," added one with some warmth. Instantly the Great One appeared and offered to do so if she on her

part would promise him the first live thing which crossed the completed structure. Going on with her knitting the while she agreed. And that night the Devil set to work. Bratful after bratful of stones he brought from a great distance, and soon the rocky torrent was spanned by an arch wide enough for a man, then for a wheelbarrow, and next for a cart. It was his Satanic Majesty's intention to make it wide enough for two coaches to pass, but the darkness was too short and the cock crew just as he came over the fell-top with more stones. Instantly his apron strings broke and a pile of stones thudded down. Unlike any beneath or around, the mound bears silent testimony to this day. Later the market woman appeared, was astonished to find a bridge, and saw her friend of yesterday awaiting her. "Aye, aye, it's very good of you!" "But —my reward?" "Aye, aye—here, Rosy," and hunting in her basket she found the oatmeal bannock which was to serve her for dinner. The dog perked up at once, the dame bowled the bannock swiftly across the bridge, the dog followed—and Old Cloutie, with a shout of rage that was heard from the hills right down to sea, disappeared with his gift—beaten by a woman's wit. Old Michael used to say that when St. Paul was chasing the Devil North the old demon came by way of our parish. In three strides he went right over England and Scotland—the first footprint is about Lunnon, the second on the hill-side there, and the third, a very deep one, for he had to make a great skip forward over a lot of water,

right in the top of Scotland. Sometimes, as a bit of great daring, we used to go to the Devil Stone and peep at the strange, deep mark. The last time I saw it, however, the distinct outlines of my early days had gone, and the mark is no more than a water-hole worn when the boulder was in some streaming hill-side. Michael used to try to get believers that the deep " cups " on the hill-sides too were the actual spots where the Devil's sweat dropped during his tremendous flight—but we had learnt some geography, and failed to agree that a man who was taking three hundred miles at a stride from Rome could have worked himself into a perspiration at about his fifth step.

Michael was great with his stories of the taistrels, whom he defined as a sort of mischievous ghost who, working in silence, was wont to put in much labour to perform a practical joke—putting the clock back was a favourite pastime—in the way of carting back to the field at night the hay led off during the day, covering up the marks of the plough, sending the cream back into the milk, preventing the butter from coming at churning day, and so on. Whenever a horse was found hot and damp in its stall after a night's " rest," Michael was sent for, and used to tell terrible stories of what taistrels could do in this line. Apparently one of their favourite employments was horse exercise at night. To-day one would make a shrewd guess at the prank of a man or maid-servant if one found a horse so blown in the stable.

But the barghaist was our terror, for did not the apparition assume all sorts of shapes, and, if neglected or interfered with, did it not shriek wildly—and woe to the man who heard it! One of the barghaist's forms was that of a white cow which licked at the windows of an isolated farm, mooing the while its desire to bring its ill-luck within—or of a big dog, black as sin, which was ever lying in the path, turn where you would. There were gates that opened at midnight without any visible reason; one could hear the sneck raised, the creak of the hinges, the "clack" as the gate closed again—but no one was visible. Another barghaist had the curious and benevolent idea of drying up even our deepest fords at times so that favoured wayfarers might get home dryshod, but next night it might be that the water was so banked up, even at the height of summer, that the road was impassable. Sometimes the barghaist was a white lady without a head, and one man fired at such a thing, thinking it was a great owl in the trees. The eldritch shrieks were heard ten miles away, and stopped two church clocks. A headless calf which tried to lick one's hand; a man walking in the lane saw something black in the middle of the road; he, foolhardy with drink, punched at it, and "with that it gave the awfullest beal. I took to my heels then, for I knew it was a barghaist." He told the tale with fear and trembling to an old neighbour next morning, who replied, "La, man, it'll be our cuddy, it never come home yesterday night." So off they went to see, and the donkey it

certainly had been. Another road corner is haunted by a black swine which crosses the road in front of the terrified human, passes a big stone, and then vanishes in a pool of water.

Old Michael used to assert that the ghosts had a real object in their perambulations : they covered mysteries, the solution of which freed them from wandering. Buried treasure was one of the favourite reasons, and one could tell of corners dug up again and again in the belief that some ghost was pointing out a hoard of gold. One of Michael's favourite tales in this connection was that of the black man of the quarry. Year after year a black man was seen to glide among the broken crags and then to mysteriously disappear, invariably at the same spot. And at this point it was that the quarrymen came upon the skeletons of eleven human beings. These had been laid in an open channel or crevice formed in the rock and then covered up. One of them had been highly jewelled, which bespoke considerable importance, having gold rings and bracelets on his fingers and wrists, and bronze ear-rings : the latter had discoloured the bones of the skull. The bones were carefully gathered up and interred in consecrated ground, and the black man has never since been seen. " Whoever they were, poor things," said the old man, " they had come to their end in a hurry, for with their bones was a ham shank and a pig's jowl—just for all the world as if they were out for a day's hunting."

But Michael's greatest stories were those of the

great fighting families of the county—and the way in which history was garbled and maltreated was curious. Michael would tell us of secret rooms, haunted with some terrible thing in this tower and that—of the room which for a century was sealed up by reason of a brothers' quarrel which ended in a duel; of the ghosts which tried to overwhelm the good lord of the family and molested no one else; of weirdly shaped creatures creeping from the tombs to give sign of death; and of the "bad" lord of one family (whom history and records give a decent reputation indeed) there were endless tales. Chiefest of these was of the manner of his death, the solemn chanting of priests in the chapel, the soul winging heavenward, the lightened vault showing that the angels were waiting to take the saved soul. Then the roar of thunder, the flash of lightning, the shrieking of storm, and in a sheet of fire the Devil and his angels came crossway the sky and intercepted the rising veil. "Did you think that him as had him all his life was going to let him go when he was dead?" And at night for long enough the people of the district were troubled by a shrieking, a rumbling, and over the tree-tops could be seen a phantom coach, all black, with black horses without heads, but spurting blue fire from their necks, a phantom driver, which was the "wicked" lord himself, headless, but with a crown of blue flame. The priest was summoned, and said the office for the laying of uneasy spirits, but just at the critical time the Devil, lying in wait, began a sing-song of

" A year and a day, a year and a day," into which the priest slipped. But the next time another spirit appeaser was sought, who arraigned the departed and his familiar, rated them soundly, and sent the soul of the wicked lord with his black chariot and headless horses to rest among the crags for ever and a day!

(*b*) The Heart of Stone

It isn't often that one has a story of the weird commencing with " Well, now, it's there for anybody to see, a Heart of Stone, cut through with one mighty stab. And it hangs by a chain to a beam in the kitchen. It's a proper heart, divided into chambers and with marks where the blood came in and out. Whose heart is it? Nobody knows. They used to tell that old Jack of the Fleets was a famous fighter and would shake the bull-ring at the Luke fair shouting, ' Nut yan, but twea on ye,' but he wouldn't touch that stone heart, either drunk or sober. ' Nay, nay, I's flayed of neither man nor the divvel nor any of his witches, but that might be the heart of a human angel.' Forbye Jack, in his tantrums, would have had to fight hard if he had said that he was going to throw the stone heart on the floor. Old Mike Rossendal had six great lads as would have fought an army before that bit of stone should have been touched. For why? Nay, I don't know whether it's the heart of an angel or a devil, and I don't care. But when the rinder-

pest crawled through our dales, not one cow belonging to the Blea died, nor did they get touched when the foot-and-mouth disease struck farms to right and to left of them and left nowt but a hirpling, bawling set of beasts on the land. It's a ha'nt is that stone heart, and it's my opinion it's waiting hanging from the beam at the Blea while its own time comes to move. For they do say that that stone has been taken across the water, that it has been burned in a limekiln, that it's been broken a hundred times in former days, but there isn't a mark on it as I could see. Touch it ! Nay, not me. As long as it's on the chain it's safe both to me and the house. What, Old Michael's grandfather it was that had a chain made for it, so they say at the Blea, as the stone was every now and then getting lost and bad things coming on the house. It was kept in a shippon then, and not so much thought about it. The last time it was lost the cows began to pick their calves, and then to die off like nits ; the grass went brown, and the corn rotted and there wasn't a bit of green about the spot. For a lot of butterflies swept down out of the sky, and for a bit the fields were white wi' 'em. They were ranker than daisies. Then in a bit there was millions of great green caterpillars as eat every blade up. The hay wasn't worth getting, and the cows come home at noon because they couldn't feed on the nasty things. Then one day it struck Old Michael's grandfather that the stone wasn't to be seen. By gum, there would be a to-do, for the old chap thought a sight

of the thing. The whole spot turned out to look for it, the muck midden was turned over and over again, the paving that had been put down a month afore was pulled up, and the beck course was gone over pretty near cobble by cobble. But never a sign of the Heart of Stone could they find. And things went from bad to worse, for the Scots come down in armies and took every horse and cart and all the hay they could carry off the farm—a thing which hadn't happened for hundreds of years. But the old farmer was a pretty warm man, and that didn't ruin him, and they kept on looking for the Heart of Stone. Some of the lads thought the schoolmaster, as was one of them wise men, had witched it away for some game of his own, but then he swore (and they laid the Bible open, face down, while he swore) that he hadn't seen it at all. At last the Heart of Stone was found, near the school, where the lads were laking ducky (a North Country game with stones) with it. Old Michael's grandfather was pleased, you may be sure—and he was very certain this sort of thing would never happen again. He was as certain as sure that the witches it was that had taken the stone afore. So he would take the Heart of Stone, put it on a chain, and hang it up in the kitchen where he could see it a dozen times every day. So he mounted his pony and rode down the middle of the beck to the smithy, so that the witches wouldn't hear. He told nobody either where he was going. At the smithy he waited for the smith to come out and to step into the water before

he spoke to him. And at midnight they stopped every clock at the Blea and the smithy and all the way round, and the priest came down and read from the Good Book while the smith and the farmer forged a chain without speaking a word. You see the witches and the Devil himself have to depend on clocks to tell them the time, but God knows every minute as it goes. They say that both the farmer and the smith were burnt with a great burst of sparks just as they were making the last link, and that Old Jack with his tongs threw the still hot metal right into the running beck just as the cock crew. And the same night, in the same way, they carried the chain up to the Blea and welded the ends together through the beam and through the hole in the Heart of Stone. So there, as the old priest said, it will bide as long as iron is iron and wood is wood, and then after these as long as the ivy grows green on the wall. What, didn't it make a difference to the folk at the Blea, for the caterpillars went dead and the grass grew and the cows held their calves, and blest if the horses didn't come wandering back from among the Scots what had been beaten in a fight about Penrith way, and had to leave their carts and wagons and run for their lives!"

One listens to such recitals with interest, perhaps because there is a tinge of superstition not yet eradicated in every one—and one day, finding myself within measurable distance of the Blea, I walked thither. But alas and alas! the Heart of Stone divided into chambers with the places where the

blood passed in and out, took on a conventional shape—it was but a stone hammer which some man in the Primitive Age had left in the meadows until some one had picked it up for a charm and a curio. The markings were but the lines of softer clay in the smooth slatey stone. Had one known where the narrator of the story was living, an interview would have been acceptable, but he had disappeared from the district.

And as I rambled back home the ancient legendary lore of the pierced stone came back to my mind. In Sweden, it is still customary to keep any ancient battle-axes of stone hung up in the cow-house. "Lucky stones" of this variety are mentioned by Pennant in 1722 as being in use in Scotland: "A farmer (in Liddlesdale) told me that a pebble naturally perforated was an infallible cure, hung over a horse that was hag-ridden, or troubled with nocturnal sweats." In Suffolk, there was full faith at one time that such a stone, suspended in the house, would prevent the cattle being troubled by nightmare, and the labourers went further sometimes, carrying the ancient stones home so that they might have good rest at night. Small flat stones with holes through are also in Old Sweden still called elf-stones, and hung on to children's necks as an antidote to fevers and other infantile complaints.

There are many other stone superstitions in our countryside: a Druidical Circle has become metamorphosed by story into a group of dancers who persisted in their amusement on Sundays, and even

induced the priest to join in their unholy revels. One night, however, the Wrath came down on them, and they were petrified in their places just beginning some dance. It is the great stone outside the circle which stands for the priest, who was also the best fiddler in seven parishes. On certain gloomy nights the stones come again to life, and until the cock crows they may be seen moving about the green sward in ponderous " figures " and " movements."

YARNS OF CHURCH AND FOLKS

In the olden days, in the North Country, it was not at all unusual for a parson to eke out his 10½*d.* per Sunday by running an alehouse. And frequently he had to apologise to good company for leaving them: "I will but preach and be with you again!" Another was tailor and clogger and butter-print maker to add a little to the £4 or so per annum his "living" was worth. One morning of flood and storm only three men met the clergyman at the chill, damp church. "What say ye three men," began the shivering cleric, "if we go up to the 'Mortal Man' and have a pint apiece?" And the sermon and prayer were not a whit the worse (and the folks at the inn made four more attenders) for being delivered over the back of a chair in the warm kitchen of the public. What would a present-day congregation say if the minister, entering the pulpit, were to bend over and address one of his charge in broad vernacular thus: "Have you seen owt of two li'le sheep of mine among yours? they're smitten in the ear like yours, but deeper in t' smit"; or arriving at the church, to find the door shut and the clerk, mounted on a flat tomb-

stone, announcing blandly: "This is to give notice that there will be no service in this church for a matter of four weeks, as the parson's best game hen has 'setten' herself in the pulpit"? Game birds were no doubt valuable in those days of cock-fighting, and as longevity was the rule, a month's delay in religion didn't seem so much to matter.

Could one but find their confessions, one is pretty certain that many of our old parsons had little aptitude for the making of sermons, and the Book of Homilies was found very useful. Two anecdotes have, however, been preserved. On entering his pulpit one Sunday, one parson fumbled considerably at the edge of a crack in the woodwork, then straightened himself as though making the best of a bad job: "Friends, the sermons is gone down the grike, but I'll read a chapter of Job worth the pair of them." At another place, where the revenues had to be helped out by the parson being boarded with each of his parishioners in turn, an ancient dame turned to the curate, who was rummaging in the small chest which held, among other things, his sermons, and said: "Thou must turn them over gayly well, they're coming a bit thick," for had not the curate preached the same matter thrice in succession!

As to sporting parsons, our dales can supply a fair sample. Some of their vagaries are well authenticated, as that of the Gosforth clergyman who regularly went about in hunting cap and breeches, and even conducted wedding and burial

services with his surplice so carelessly donned that his very unclerical garb was plainly in view. Of course the Rev. E. M. Reynolds, who for about forty years hunted the Coniston foxhounds, was a clergyman, but so far as the writer can discover he never held a benefice during his long career as M.F.H. The greatest of the cliffs which go to make Scout Scar, near Kendal, is called Hodgson's Loup, or Leap, the legend being that Hodgson, a hunting parson, in the height and ardour of the chase galloped his steed over the edge here. Its rider, himself unhurt, was " in at the death " in the double event of both horse and fox. It was Hodgson who used to preach loudly on Sabbath observance in the morning, ending with " Do as I say, not as I do," before going hunting on the Sunday afternoon. He, it is said, was driven into his wild manners by the non-attendance of his flock, who were a very sporting set, and at last announced : " Ye wicked of Brigsteer and Helsington, if you will go a-hunting on a Sunday, behold I will go with you." And it is true of a keen wrestler, who was also a cleric, that he did not object to " trying a fall " in the churchyard while his scant congregation was assembling. As the bell ceased ringing, he seized his clothes and rushed off to the vestry. " Aye, lad, and he was a good parson, too," said a frosty-polled veteran to me some years ago, " he hadn't a bit of vice anywhere in him." But the parson at Wasdale Head, who joined in the chase of the " Gurt Dog of Ennerdale," a notorious sheep worrier, was hardly a habitual

Sunday sportsman, but what could a man do when Tyson Ritson (who ought to have been minding his book better) called out at the middle of the Litany, " Here's the Ennerdale gurt dog chassing for its life " ? And in a few seconds the church was emptied of men, women and children alike ! The parson got a bad start, as he had to put away his book and take off his surplice, but he plied his clogs " gaily weel," and had his share of the unfruitful chase. For the great dog, a mastiff with evil disposition, lived a little while longer on murdered mutton.

Most of our ancient clergy had to grapple with the musical side of the service themselves, though now and again he might have the aid of some wandering fiddler or bagpiper. And, of course, in the better parishes a barrel-organ played the hymn-tunes over—unless it were in a wayward mood and gave the congregation " Pop goes the weasel ! " instead. Here, however, is a note from as recent a date as 1867 : " A minister may be seen even now, leading the choir in the aisle, in his surplice, with bow and fiddle in his hands, and then resuming his place in the desk, with becoming solemnity, until the course of the service requires his instrument again. His sense of harmony is acute ; for in the middle of the psalm, his arms will fly apart, and the volume of sound be stopped, until an offensive note has been ejected, and the strain rectified and renewed." It was a blind parson who halted in the middle of his reading (or recitative) to ask, when a farmer clattered down the little church in his ironshod clogs :

"Wha's that come in?" "It's Dan Mossop of Fell End." "Afoot, or on horse-back?" Late-comers went in with circumspection after that.

Our parsons have made many curious approaches to their churches. One has not yet seen the flying parson (the Rev. Sidney H. Swann, now at Levens, in Westmorland), manœuvring an aeroplane near the vestry door, but these men have been carried across fords in carts, or in quieter waters have gone pick-a-back on a man on stilts. The Vicar of Shap, when he takes his monthly service at Swindale's tiny chapel, will sometimes wish for a dog-sleigh or a pair of ski to get him across the snowy miles of moor and fell. The Vicar of Muncaster used to hold service at Waberthwaite, and the hour was so varied that he was able after preaching to cross the Esk on the stepping-stones while the tide was low. In King Charles the Second's day the pious clergyman of Wigton had to pass between butchers' stalls on his way through the churchyard, and preach to an audience who had their newly bought joints of meat hanging over the backs of their seats. Of course, every one has heard of the church by the shore, in the cellars of which the smugglers used to house their kegs awhile, and of the wit who wrote—

> "There's a Spirit above, and a spirit below;
> A Spirit of love, and a spirit of woe;
> The Spirit above is the Spirit Divine,
> But the spirit below is the spirit of wine."

However, it was more usual in our part of the world

for the clerk, a man of the world, to give the preacher some notice when the church was not in a fit state for service, and forthwith to make due announcement among the neighbours that the usual service would not be held until the Sunday following.

Among the unconventional furnishings one hears of, and at times sees in our old chapels among the mountains, might be included the keg which used to hold the sacrificial wine at Matterdale, near Ullswater; the wooden pitch-pipe with which the ancient precentor used to give the correct (or otherwise) pitch for the long-winded hymns of his generation; the dog-gate which kept the more unruly of the shepherd-friends outside the church during the hours of service. I don't know of a thatched church now in our Northern diocese, but there are records of one in the Pennine which was completely unroofed by the fell-sheep in a winter of heavy snow. And the ruins of our lost chapels, and little piles in lonely glens from which the population has ebbed, show that a floor of trampled earth and lime served its purpose in days gone by. Some of the ancient chapels were the last word in disrepair. At Langdale there was a sudden commotion at the beginning of the sermon, after which the voice of an ancient dame piped out: "If I'd been killed I'd have been right served, for didn't you say 'Behold, I come quickly'!" The pulpit had fallen to pieces and deposited the Vicar somewhat hurriedly in the front pew. A final story:—A visiting clergyman at one of these little places where no vestry is pro-

vided, had got hold of a dingy-looking thing which might have been intended for a dirty surplice, when the clerk called out in alarm, " You mustn't put that on—it's Old Ann's penance sheet." For a sin of frailty half a century before a woman had been compelled, as the custom long was, to do penance by appearing at church with a candle in her hands and dressed in a white sheet. I don't think any penance sheet is now to be found behind the door of any dales churches to upset the decorum of a visiting clergyman.

In resistance to all changes in religious matters, the dalesmen are very stubborn. At one time many of the lesser churches had no burial-grounds about them : the dead had to be taken many miles to bury. Wheeled vehicles were practically unknown, and the coffins had to be carried either on horse-back or by the neighbours. Special routes were taken to the parent church, and the " corpse road," carried direct over often wild upland, is clearly visible in many areas to-day. On one occasion a giant at an outlying farm died, and it was essayed to carry his body to consecrated ground. But long before the church came in sight the strength of the bearers had given out, so they buried their friend in the wilds. His grave, piled high with boulders, is pointed out to this day. The chapel at Seathwaite owes its burial-ground to a like incident, but it was a snowstorm that caused the corpse to be abandoned. When a wheeled bier was suggested in order that the way to the churchyard might be

somewhat easier for the friends of the departed, one old man strenuously objected. He would not give a penny piece: "If t' neighbours are not willing to carry me to t' church, why, then I'll walk!"

Nonconformity can show its humours too—one must spare a page for a couple of anecdotes. Some sixty years ago there flourished an itinerant preacher, commonly called the Apostle of the Dales. He was a bluff person with a tremendous voice. His method was direct, extremely so at times. Once he occupied the pulpit in a remote hamlet where Yorkshire gives place to Westmorland. The attenders at this chapel were mostly yeomen who cultivated their own acres and who were not altogether poor. The revivalist delivered a stirring sermon, pointing out the indebtedness of man to his Maker, after which the collection box was passed round. As he sat in the pulpit, the old revivalist's eyes began to "leuk a bit queer," then, as the box completed its course, he leapt to his feet. "Bring that box here." The officer accordingly handed it up, with some wonder, for Old Jonathan had already contributed his mite. The preacher shook up the contents for a full minute, the while watching the jigging coins. Then, straightening to his full height, in a roar which broke the Sabbath silence like a salvo of artillery, he commented: "I thought so." He paused: the folks sat wonder-struck, and perhaps a little ashamed. "Statesmen of ——, if the Lord came here to-day and said 'What owest thou me?' you would put a hand in a pocket and reply, 'Here, Lord, a

penny.' " The next collection taken by the Apostle of the Dales in that chapel was entirely of silver, and few small pieces of that.

In another dale, after the old evangelist had preached on the dual ministrations of faith and prayer, he called for a prayer meeting. A good sprinkling stayed behind, and after the Apostle had spoken another veteran rose. He found words difficult at first, then burst into enthusiastic declaration over a personal experience. " You know, brothers, my farm at Stoneyhaws was nobbut a li'le 'un, and we hed a big family. At last we were simply back-set and for-set : we didn't kna what to dew, did we Jane? " this to his wife. " So I knelt me doon and prayed to the Lord to enlarge my coasts, for we wer' sartently a big family, and a week at efter John Thwaite o' t' Burn deed : I gat his farm, and we've nivver leukt back sen. Blessed be the name of the Lord for his mercies."

YARNS OF A DALES HOME

(*a*) The Old Warming Pan

"It's a bit since that was used?"

"Aye, a goodish bit: they're out of fashion except as an ornament. I'm fair sure that none of our lasses could turn their hand to warming a bed with it at all. They would be certain to burn the sheets. That warming pan would not be so bright if it was being used regular."

We were sitting in the low-ceiled house-place of an ancient farm high up in the dales. The copper-mounted ornament on the wall caught my eye, and when next the old man's monologue about sheep halted, I turned his attention to this.

"Aye, it's an old ancient thing is that. I can remember well my grandmother using it when I was a wee lad, and my great-grandfather, who was upwards of ninety, saying that it was made for his wife's mother a conny bit back. I guess it's seen a few changes, but it's never been away from this kitchen a day that I know on. How did they use a warming pan—what, Sarah lass, thou must just ask thy grandmother what she did with it the first day she spent here!" And the old chap laughed with glee over some recollection of the past.

" You see, Mary and me had been sweethearts for a conny while afore my mother died (my father had died afore her), and after a month or two " (" It was nobbut six weeks awtogether, Reuben," interposed the cheery old lady across the fire-place) " of daddling about and doing my own housework—'cause my sister didn't see fit to leave her service: she was after the master's son and got him; he was a taistrel—I got tired, and one evening popped myself off down the dale to see what Mary had to say about it. Now she wasn't willing to be wedded so soon at after my mother's funeral. So back I went thinking mad to myself as to what I should do. I had told Mary pretty much about the state of the house, and her mother said that both on them should come up in the morning after I had gone to the fell and give the place a regular cleaning. I was for making sure of things, I can tell you; except for what I had got at Mary's I had tasted nothing but burnt porridge for weeks, and I was that tired of burnt porridge that it was years after before I would touch them if they were nobbut touched in the pan. However, when I got up in the morning I thought to myself, 'Here's a game; I'll tip a bucket of water into my bed, and make them believe I've been sleeping like that.' I didn't do quite so bad as that, but I did souse a couple of mopfuls right over the bed. Then off I dodged to my sheep. But it didn't take me long to get back that day you may depend, and when I got into the house-place there was no warming pan on

the wall. After a minute Mary's mother came down. 'Reuben, thou silly lad, thou'll have got thy death of cold with sleeping in yon bed. Away down to our house with thee, and get something both hot and strong.' 'Where's Mary?' says I, none budging an inch. 'She's upstairs with the warming pan.' 'Then I'll wait for her.' In about two minutes more Mary came down for more elden for the pan. 'Now,' says I, 'when are we to be weddt?' She burst out crying at that, and then she said, 'Reuben, thou's none fit to live by thyself. Mother says it can be as soon as we like.'"

Old Reuben had a fine sense of story-telling; many a time I have gone miles out of my way to meet him and get yet another from his store of legend and anecdote of the valley.

Of course, after the story of Reuben's stratagem, we had to have a practical demonstration of how a warming pan should be used. The old lady stirred up the peats until not a particle of brown was visible, then with tongs she took one after another of the white flaming lumps until the brass bowl was full. Then she snapped close the perforated lid. In a trice the pan was too hot to be touched, and would have scorched linen at the merest touch. The trick was, the old lady explained, to so handle the bedclothes that the pan never touched them at all, but left sufficient heated air between the sheets to completely warm the bed. The decay of the warming pan as a household utensil dated, she said, from the time home-made linen

was superseded by the sheetings manufactured in Lancashire. The old linen had a natural surface like enamel, as smooth and as cold, but the newer stuff was not so closely finished, was soft and woolly on the surface and therefore warmer to the touch. Then I remembered the dales saying of Ruskin, a man much respected by the farmers and shepherds, that he at one time wished to use nothing but the old-fashioned bed-linen, but that in a few years he was compelled to abandon his principles and to use for comfort the machine-made and warmer substitutes. I said something of this (I was a mere youngster then, and had never read a line of Ruskin, though I knew he was a man to venerate) to the old lady, who at once replied, " His missus or housekeeper can't have known how to use a warming pan." The old couple still used some of the hand-made linen of their young days' but, as the old lady mentioned with pride, when you have seven daughters and them all wedded it makes a bit of a hole in the mother's linen chest, especially when one cannot get a yard of the old linen for love or money. (Since those days at least two " linen industries " have been established within thirty miles of the old dale, and the hand-made material is now making its way into the linen chests again.)

Reuben, who had been listening to the discussion with tolerant amusement, now bethought him of a story. " You see that dinge near the bottom—yes, there !—of the pan. That was made by my

uncle when he came back from Inkermann. He must have a bit of a haybay for sure, so a lot of young fellows gathered up from this farm and that, and there was lots of laughing and joking. Then one of them, I think it was Tom Morphett, grandfather of him who has just taken the Ashes Farm, began a frog-step, uncle keeping time none too gently with a bit of stick on the warming pan until my grandmother got at him through the crowd and ' poo'ed his lug gay weel.' Grandmother thought gradely deal more of her warming pan than allow it to be beaten into bits as a drum. And there was another time I remember when my grandfather was brought in from the fell near dead with cold. That winter there was a snowstorm early on, when the sheep were still loose on the high fells, and every man in the dale went up to help gather the flocks. Some way or other grandfather missed his way, and I can just recollect the anxious night. We little bairns were brought up from Low Gate so that my mother could keep things going here, for grandmother had near lost the use of her legs. When they carried grandfather in, they laid him down on the hearth-stone, and while the open fire was warming him to life again the old pan was in use on his back. They said he was so cold that though the pan was near red-hot and scorched his shirt to bits he never felt it for long enough. That was the last time he took the fell, and though he lived on to the next summer, both him and grandmother went within a week of each other."

I asked Reuben one day who had made the warming pan. "Why, the smith to be sure. In those days a smith was worth his salt; he had to make horseshoes and gavelocks, locks and keys, ploughs and harrows—anything where metal was used. I have known Dick Wright, who lived by the Green, be making clog irons and warming pans on the same day. Where did the brass come from? I don't know. Dick used to get it by the sheet when he went to the town, but I know that the copper came right to him from Furness. There used to be mines up at Coniston—big mines they were—and the copper was taken in boats from them right down the lake to somewhere about Ulverston, where there was a furnace to smelt it. Not much copper came this way; it was mainly sent away by sea."

The old warming pan is still in its place on the wall in that dales farm, although still another generation is in occupation. Sarah Ann is as proud of it, though she confesses her inability to make use of it in her day's work. There it hangs, its bright bowl reflecting the dancing firelight from prosaic coal, not odorous peat; reflecting, too, the bright faces of children during the days, and of the staider elders in the long winter evenings. The old warming pan is an ornament now, yet I remember old Reuben's regard for it, and his quaint, true saying: "You'll always find friends like yon warming pan; what you put in you get out, but in less measure and more useful. The white-hot peat gives just the warmth a bed wants—a cold stone is a cold stone all the world over."

(*b*) The Library of the Seventh Son

The Seventh sat in the old oak arm-chair at the head of the table. He could not understand why we wanted to look at the books. He was the sort of man who learns by observation, not by text—in some ways (and to his own mind) averse from technical education, yet taking the keenest possible interest in everything appertaining to his own farm. He is a tall man and a well-built one, the sort of man who in his younger days doubtless graced the wrestling ring.

As the girl collected the books from the cupboard and high shelf, from upstairs, from the staircase window, even one from the byre and half a dozen from the interstices of the beam which ran across the living-room, he made curious comments on them.

"Have you ever read any of them?" I asked.

"I don't remember that I ever opened a book after I left school. And there's no one here that ever looks at an old book. The lasses are for ever reading love stories out of green and yellow papers, and the lads must have their noses stuck into some picture paper. But my father was a great reader. You see, when he was young he was sent to the Grammar School, and got a terrible lot of book learning. He used to do all the writing for his neighbours. I never write a letter, but often when I have walked a dozen miles to see a man, and found him from home for the day, I have wished that I had used a penny stamp."

The pile in front of us was in all stages of decom-

position, chiefly through damp, though the rats had made free with those left in the staircase and the upper chambers. They were all leather-bound—relics of the magnificent day in book-binding.

"Now," said the Seventh—he is the seventh of the same name to hold the farm in this secluded dale—"that will be an interesting book. It's all about Sheep Smits. It belonged to my old grandfather (on my mother's side), who was a yeoman up in the fells. At about the end of his time they took it into their heads that it would make things easier if their marks—every sheep farm has its own way of marking its sheep—were all put into one book, and so this was done. The chap as printed it, I have heard say, had a little shop in Penrith, and was the same man as printed some of a Mr. Coolridge's work. Do you know anything of this Coolridge?"

Of course, he was referring to S. T. Coleridge and the publication of *The Friend*, but one doubts whether the printers were in any way identical.

"My father used to say that there were a lot of writing chaps about Windermere that made a living even then by writing—by gum! who would have thought that such a fellow should be sitting in this house-part to-day with me—and that little book over there was written, I have heard say, for one of them!"

This was the small volume of poems and sketches by William Pearson, of Borderside, one of Wordsworth's intimates, and as a naturalist probably one of the best and most observant of his day.

Our host is discursive: "See that book with the rough binding? That'll be *The Life of Thomas Ellwood.* It's the only book there that I ever did look at. There's two spots where it mentions this farm, but maybe you cannot find them at first try."

The Seventh was surprised when in a few seconds I had unearthed the references, by aid of the copious index.

"This day I came to the Hagg, where William and Mary —— gave me good welcome—a change from the noisy reception I had just had in Greytown." "After passing an hour with friend —— I called at the Hagg on my way to Greytown. I found the house without master or mistress, and the only one of the family that was not in the fields, for it was haytime, was young William. 'Where is thy father?' said I. 'He is in Virginia doing the Lord's work.' 'And thy mother?' 'She is doing the Spirit's work in Australia.' It seemed that these worthy people had been called away soon after my last visit, and no one knew when their return could be looked for."

"Yes," said the Seventh, "all my fore-elders were Friends, or, as they more often call themselves now, Quakers. Some of them travelled far."

The next work was quite out of the usual for a dales farm, and even the Seventh could only guess at its origin. It was one of the old-fashioned Books of Beauty, done in the most sumptuous style of its day, full of the most sentimental stuff—"bosh," the maid of to-day would call it. The engravings

were very pretty as a whole, though a Hogarthian Rape of the Sabines was an anomaly. This book had its clean end-pages intact; most of the end-pages were either missing in this collection or written over with all sorts of business memoranda.

"One of my great-uncles, him as had most of these books, wrote his will in the end of a book, and the lawyers had a rare time of it before the paper was found. The witnesses had died before him, and it was only through the parson's daughter, who thought a deal of my great-aunt, going through every book she could find in the dale that it turned up. And then it was among her father's books that she found it. What? The old priest a book-man? Not that I know of. More like he had picked the book up because it had in it a lot about the best way of measuring peats and stones. Him and uncle never measured alike, and were always having bother."

But those clean end-sheets, one wonders. Perhaps they tell a little of some old love-story. Did a young man buy this tribute, as proper a thing as for a modern to present his fiancée with chocolates, to give to his lady love? Did she accept him, or was it returned? Handling the old book, the relic of some old affair of the heart, my wife suggested this as the story: "It was the Fourth that bought it, a dour Quaker youth who was smitten with love for a girl of the town, and for whom he was willing to incur the religious wrath of his family. As he went along the lanes riding, with this in his saddle-bag

(for he would not dare its purchase in Greytown for fear of scandal), his horse shied, and there, by the open gateway, was the daughter of a neighbour. The Fourth had been dreaming of the Girl of the Town, and, for her sake, was willing to look fair at every woman. But this woman, she was fair, and suddenly to the Fourth came a vision (one which many men should have more than once in their days) of two firesides—one with the fair Quaker, a quiet, homely nook with a welcome for its master, the other, generally empty, as the Girl of the Town wanted her pleasures. And those two firesides settled that the Book of Beauty, obtained at so much cost, came back to the Hagg in the Fourth's saddle-bag, and never went away."

The while my wife is delivering this epitome of a romance, the Seventh is looking on in round-eyed wonder. Such imagination savours almost of forbidden things, but he says : " Likely enough, likely enough, mistress, although how you came to guess so near is very wonderful. It was always said that my great-grandfather met his wife, a Quaker bred and born, in the lane when he was riding to Greytown." Another volume, in decidedly fusty condition, turns out to be *Elegant Readings*, selections from the classics by some long-forgotten gentleman of the University of Oxford.

But the most wonderful book of all, and of its contents the Seventh had no idea, was an old folio, printed in the days when emancipation from the Black Letter was but recent. The text was a long

discussion of the amenities between Greek and Roman philosophers—I never read a line of it. On the title-page, in a wonderful old handwriting, were the words: "And having finished this book I am come again to the first page to witness that the diary is entirely in my own handwriting, and concerns only myself." Hardly an invitation to read further, surely. But, as I guessed, the handwriting and the print were as the poles asunder, for the Second, whose diary we had open, cared little for the philosophical argument, and much for the everyday woes of those about him. It was not easy to decipher the dead-brown ink, the thin upright caligraphy, but it was well worth while. The Second, soon after starting his diary, had constituted himself physician to the whole countryside. His knowledge did not go beyond herbs, but again and again he writes: "There is nothing in the world of medicine better than herbs, except it may be the philosopher's stone, and that I have not yet seen." Apparently the discovery of the philosopher's stone was continually being announced, like the soarer and the electric long-distance car of to-day.

Here are a few of the entries, which, in all, covered every inch of white between the book covers: "June 16—Saw Tom Dodd's wife, who is not yet over her confinement. Will get her a tonic of herbs together to-night. Mem.—Bog bean is said by Mr. Wilson, of Greytown, to be of much use in her case." One must believe Mr. Wilson badly wrong in his remedy, and certainly the Second never

mentions Bog bean again, except as a cure for ague. "This disease comes from frequenting damp fields and ill-placed houses. It is a good principle to doctor it, as other diseases, with herbs gathered where the disease arises. Nature ever provides cause and effect." Another entry: "John Armstrong's cow died of a sweat between night and morning. J. A. says she was bewitched. He is grievously in error." "Tom Berry will to the wars, no matter what his father saith. Believe that a good dose of calomel and simple feeding would take this conceit out of him. T. B. has not seen war." "Mary Atkinson called me in to speak about her daughter who is in trouble in her service. Her master is a wicked man indeed, and will come to no good end. Jane A. must be fetched home."

There are scores of entries like these—surely the short and simple annals of the poor, written by one who knew their need. "Had argument with Priest concerning the future state. Told him he was a fool. Mem.—Do not again lose thy temper, which is a reproach."

The other books were of very ordinary type, though one included a curious list of cases tried by his Majesty's Judge at Assizes, with their savage sentences. No yeoman seems to have been indicted, and no "gentleman," but plenty of labourers and the like. The law, as the Second put it in one of his homilies, "is bred in inequality, and is altogether a falsehood." There was the inevitable county history, well thumbed in the places where

adjacent parishes were dealt with, but uncut for the distant dales. Not a single book of travel in the whole set—the Seventh avers that it was thought wicked in his young days to speak of foreign countries, except with contempt.

"Well, now, are you satisfied?" says the Seventh, as the last batch of books are turned over, "for here comes the lass with tea."

(*c*) A Relic of the 'Forty-five

During the wild evenings of November and December the old iron cannon shot lying in the fire-place often sends one on a thoughtful journey backward to the stirring days of Prince Charlie's raid toward London. The shot was cast in some British arsenal, and has never tasted powder. One's mind sees it handed from castle to castle until at the wild flurry of Prestonpans, when its Hanoverian owners were overwhelmed. What were its adventures on the Highlanders' march to Derby one can hardly guess, but there is in my mind a vivid picture of its last days in the Royal Stuart's cause. And most of this is a boyhood recollection of fireside stories. My own fireside glow, though not from aromatic peat or crackling wood, brings back the semicircle of rugged faces, men and women inured to work and stress in the open air, with wee children sitting on the hearth simply revelling in the genial heat. Some nights—it was the time of Gordon and the Egyptian War—the *Illustrated London News* was

there, and it was a picture of the Young Pretender in this that started off the stories. Old Will, whose mother had dwelt at one of the farms which the Highlanders occupied, was the first to speak, but most of the older people had details gleaned here and there from the firesides of their early days. And it is from the tags of these, with some assistance from the connected narrative of the Chevalier de Johnstone, good officer for King James but an erratic war correspondent, that my mind has welded up this tale.

Information had come to the Stuart army on its arrival at Kendal that the country around Penrith was in the hands of the Duke of Cumberland; certainly, the advance party of Hussars had been chased back from Penrith and only made their way through the mountain passes back to Kendal with difficulty. It therefore behoved the Scots to advance cautiously. Very early in the morning of the 16th of December the whole Highland army started from Kendal, hoping to reach Penrith that night, a distance of about twenty-five miles. Four companies of the Duke of Perth's Lowlanders were detailed off for the arduous duty of escorting the artillery. The Highland infantry, though possessed of a tremendous veneration of "the musket's mother," were little help owing to their ignorance of horse-work and wheeled vehicles. One can still trace the old road from Kendal to the hills superseded by the modern turnpike. It is innocent of metal, and in bad weather would cut up consider-

ably. There were thirteen pieces of artillery, and by the time they had passed the road was like a ploughed field—wheels sank up to the naves, and the cavalry escort had regularly to trace their horses to the guns in order to make any progress at all. The first two miles or so out of Kendal went fairly; the road had a certain amount of regular use; but when the army got above Stocks and faced the steep Otter Bank, trouble of the worst sort commenced. Some snow still lay on this higher ground, and rain was falling, which made the sounder pieces very slippery. The Highlanders knew full well that the dale behind them was unfriendly—had not one of their Hussars been shot from a window a day or two previously and over a hundred armed men roughly handled by the unarmed mob! Besides, if the report of the Duke being in Cumberland were true, it was essential that these guns should be got to the front to support the infantry. Again and again the guns stuck in the mud—and only after the most tremendous efforts were they extricated. Every farm was looted for straw and ropes, and later for farm carts and wagons, for under the strain the flimsy ammunition carts began to give out. The artillery carriages had been built to withstand such work. As the day went on the convoy crawled forward slowly, but at dark they were less than six miles from Kendal and still had the great mountain range to cross to reach Shap. If you follow the great road to the North to-day you will see near the sixth milestone on your left

a decidedly marked roadway swinging up a bluff—that is the old road, and to that point on the 16th of December the Chevalier de Johnstone and his four companies of cavalry got their artillery train. I can picture in my mind some of the misery of that night; the storm of snow and rain raging, the air bitterly cold, the men huddled up as they fell when the word for "rest" was given, the tired horses—every one foodless, wet and jaded. In the darkness the officers patrolling up and down the long slope on which their charge was scattered, silent, anxious. No fires could be lit for fear of the enemy who, the report of scouts said, were in force at Kendal only six miles away—General Wade behind them, the Duke of Cumberland probably in front, with his many cavalry and mounted infantry operating in a country perfectly friendly to him. Small comfort, too, to know that only a small rearguard had been spared to defend the guns, and that the clans were bivouacked at Shap, ten miles ahead. Hour after hour of that terrible night passed—horses died from the exposure, as well as, so local stories say, one wounded man. With the first light of dawn came a challenge from the top of the hill: "Who comes there?" It was the Macdonalds of Glengarry, sent back by the Prince to bring on the artillery. Scouts who had been lying out on the road all night now came in with reports that the Duke of Cumberland's cavalry had not, after all, reached Kendal on the Monday. But down the Eden valley, streaming over the lofty Pennine

passes, were the armies of General Wade, with Major Oglethorpe's cavalry working the roads between. From that corner of the upland road the party in occupation of Grayrigg hause could be easily seen, and it was clear that two armies were penetrating the passes only a few miles apart. The Prince's route was the more difficult, passing over a height of about 1300 feet.

In an hour the still tired horses were put to their harness again, and another wearisome day began. The ground was frozen hard, and beasts and men slipped. The bouldery track took toll of wheels, and one ammunition wagon broke down utterly. Then came a call that the enemy were advancing—a body of horsemen appeared in view within a mile—so that Lord George Murray gave the word to send the wagon backward over the steep incline on the right of the road. This was done; for a few yards the wagon body held together, then it smashed against a big rock, and round shot, shell and chain shot went rolling into a little tarn at the foot of the steep. It was here that my old cannon shot ended its service for the Stuarts, and in this shallow pool it lay for some sixty years until it occurred to some one that the hollow would be more valuable to the farm if drained. The new road passes within a few yards of the tarn, and it was a simple matter to run a culvert beneath, dig a trench and gradually draw the water off. When this was done, the hollow was found to be covered with shot from the old ammunition wagon, and among the matter

collected was a sword in scabbard, probably the property of some Highlander who had forgot in the rush of events his weapon. And every now and then, when the dip is ploughed, we see a few solid shot or small grenades turned up—mementoes of that wild night when the Prince's men bivouacked on the mountain pass.

It is no part of the cannon-ball's story, but the day's labour with the Prince's army only succeeded in bringing the guns ten miles further on the way to Shap, by which time the Young Pretender was at Penrith. The next day following saw the battle of Clifton Moor fought by Lord George Murray in order to save his ordnance, which was lagging on its way from the hills.

And to-day I have stood by that little flat where once was the tarn, and, looking up the brae to where the wind and rain made a storm, saw the green line of the olden road climbing up into the invisible recesses of the mountain. A few Herdwicks are passing along it now, collected from the distant fells, and at the foot is a gamekeeper's cottage. Since Prince Charlie's time the larch has come to our hill-sides, but they are otherwise much as they were then. The wild slogan of the Scot has gone, and the hoot of the motor-car now vies with the mewing of the buzzard, the call of the grouse, and the bleating of many sheep.

YOUNG-DAYS YARNS

(*a*) The Skiddaw Hermit

When the storms were roaring through the poplars outside the little whitewashed cottage, and the night was "gay wild" with snow or rain, my grandfather used to say, "Well noo, lads, this is better than owt the Skiddaw Hermit ever got on a winter night." Such an expression aroused my curiosity, and I made inquiry among the dalesfolk as to who this Hermit might be, who had seen him, and the like. Of course I know now that my information is quite inaccurate. Only two of our dalesmen had seen the man, but the others made up for that in wild suggestion and romance about this strange character. Some gave the mystery a good character, saying merely that some days he was quite surly and mightn't be quite bright. Others stopped at nothing in their descriptions.

"Why-a, why-a, lad, the Skiddaw Hermit wasn't the first man to take to the woods and fells when he didn't feel bright. I've heard our parson say that some old king used to do it in Bible times, so-a it must be all right. But it's a dowlish way to go about making a cure. I've known a shepherd, it was one

of the Meccar lads from Shule End, that used to go right crazy when he'd had a baddish time wi' t' wicks and footrot. What, bairn, he did nowt but bark like his dog and blate like his sheep. They used to send him first to t' asylum for a week, then down to Silloth or thereabouts, where there were plenty of folk astir. But one time old Tim Cooper fiddled him well again—playing him three-reels and such-like on the fiddle from breakfast-time till near eight o-clock at night, when the daft chap lowpt up and began step-dancing as if he'd done nowt else for a week."

The shepherds of the high fells right across the Lake Country knew this wanderer quite well : though he made his quarters and first appearance in the Skiddaw neighbourhood, he went far afield. I have heard that he used to call on Ruskin at Brantwood, for the Hermit was some sort of artist, and that after such calls he was never short of money. And I have seen a stick which the unknown presented to a woodcutter which still shows signs of a design traced in brown—John says that this was at first black, done by some trick of wood smoke. One shepherd had for a while a sketch in red chalk on a piece of slate—a gay bonny view of a waterfall he called it—but forgetting that rain was destructive to chalk, he left it out while he was having a bit of lunch and the picture had disappeared.

The Skiddaw Hermit in summer lived pretty much wild in the woods, but in winter he built some sort of shelter of sticks and sods—and for one winter

a carriage umbrella made a fairly good roof to his abode. The dress of the man has been described to me in very opposite terms : he was according to one careful to be tidy, to another a scarecrow after a wet week would at any time provide a better-kept suit—no tramp went about so badly put on. Old John used to say that the Hermit was friendly with Lanty Slee, the illicit distiller, and at times, for liquid payment, would assist in the making, hiding or distributing of the contraband. But rebutting evidence has it that no one saw the Hermit drink other than water or soup from the meat which had been given him. All the stories I have heard are at one in that the squires of this hall or that, the true leaders of the Lake Country, used at times to visit his haunts, carrying letters to him, and talk long and secretly. Never, however, did any dalesman get a reply to the question, either veiled or direct, as to the other's true identity. To put it once was met with silence; the second time: "He was painting in the ghyll ahint our house and had near finished, but threw down both paints and brushes and went off without a word." The painting, on closer examination, had been smudged with a broad band of strong colour and was ruined. I never could come across any one who had any work of this erratic painter. The Squire, if he made purchase, never seems to have preserved anything of the sort—and the Hermit, so far as I have heard, never gave his work broadcast to any woodsmen.

The discovery of the Hermit was very casual:

a shepherd found him "sitting on a cobble just aside of a waterfall: he didn't speak at all." His disappearance was equally casual. There was no alteration in the man's ways to show that the "brain storm" (if such was the trouble) was passing. But day after day, week after week, month after month passed and the Hermit did not revisit his haunts. Whether he returned to civilisation, or succumbed to accident or exposure on the loneliest mountains, none of the dalesmen seem to know. Though—oh yes! I must mention it—old Mally Thexton, "as began to read when she was over seventy and maisled hersel' wi' novels and sic like," had a fine theory of a beautiful young lady, a lawyer, an irate father now softened of his wrath, and a good deal more to account for his disappearance. But Old John, spitting into the glowing peat ashes, answered to this, "Aye, Mally, an' if thou read thy Bible as much as them novel books of thine thou would ha'e sent him up to heaven in a chariot of fire."

It is curious how persistent these stories are in our dales. My present instances are largely drawn from Lake Country lore, but little inquiry would furnish one with equally interesting yarns about the Pennine dales or other sparsely populated and wild districts. Of course, under the old legal system it was not unusual for a criminal to evade pursuit by lying out on the fells. And up there at times were organised bands of sheep-stealers, whisky distillers, highway robbers and the like. With the establishment of a national police system this practice came

finally to its end. Under the old law, Old Sim held to his cavern home in the Vale of St. John for some time before going right out of the county. A certain man had left Wythburn market merry and in possession of a known large sum of money: next day his body, partly unclothed, was found in the lake. There was no arrest, but the dale held that Sim and his son had murdered the man. There was enough evidence to hang both men, as murder cases go to-day, but the old law was very weak in these remote dales. In its cups, and then sober, the dale kept the two Sims marked men. Shortly, the younger left the countryside, but the older, having some property there, stayed on. But his unwelcomeness preyed on his mind: he was afraid of "the avenger of blood," and began to reside in a cave up the slope of Helvellyn near the famous Castle Rock—a wind- and rain-swept place.

I have seen the cave of a recent hermit: a cavern scooped out of the fractured rocks beneath a great oak. It was like a huge nest, every corner was carefully padded with moss, and a cosy place indeed. But the hermit soon left, and disappeared from ken. There is a good deal of quaint lore attaching to the hermits as one may hear, but why the dalesfolk should have venerated and consulted them on business and the future passes comprehension. The only characteristic they seem to have in common is the taciturnity of a low intelligence, with, if teased, either insane violence or a retreat swift beyond the pursuit of the dalesmen.

(*b*) The Old Sledgate

A Smuggling Tradition

Frankly, I don't know how much of this story is true, but none of it is of my intentional invention. The narrative has come to me in different ways and from many channels, and has pieced itself bit by bit in my mind. The first I heard of it was from my grandmother, who claimed that the man who built a road over the fells was an ancestor of ours. I remember well the old creeper-clad cottage, with its patch of green in front, and particularly well its interior, where, a wee chap, I sat and divided attention between the rustling of the poplars outside and the polished gun, with its long, single barrel, which was fixed over the chimney-piece. I coveted that gun with all the abandon of a child; I haunted that low-ceiled living-room because of its presence, and that possibly is why I remember grandmother's story so well.

"Aye, he used to git his stuff frae Scotlan', an' land it somewhar aboot St. Bees; then they used to bring it away inland on ther pownies, reet up intull t' fells. Ther was nae rooad at first, sae Moses set tull and maed yan, an' it com reet ower intull Borrowdal'."

My ancestor, therefore, was a smuggler, and that fact fired my childish imagination, for Jack had a picture of smugglers in his last prize. "Was that his gun?" I once asked. Grandmother started:

" Why, bless the bairn; it's a queer 'un; it's been lissenin' a' t' time." But she didn't tell me whose the coveted weapon was.

After this childhood episode I lose track of Moses for many a year; uncles and aunts and venerable connections of the family gave me many a tag of information, till my smuggler became a mass of irreconcilable statements. Many a time for my own satisfaction I have conned over the story, more than once as I sat on the shoulder of Green Gable and traced the green course of Old Moses' sledgate along the northern face of Great Gable, and last Easter at Wasdale Head I first made an effort to tell the whole story as it had unconsciously framed itself in my mind, and this is somewhat of my talk :

" Moses knew well that a lugger or a schooner could easily clear from France, or Holland, or Scotland with a full cargo of dutiable goods for the Isle of Man. But the navigation of the Irish Sea is curious, and such a boat was often blown to shelter in the deeps under St. Bees Head. From St. Bees, or even, on his more daring days, from Whitehaven itself, Moses put out in a smaller craft. The cargo was swiftly transferred and a dash made for the shore. The preventive men were not too vigilant, believing for years that no regular trade was possible on a shore so rocky and yet without even tolerable harbours, so that Moses had so far an easy time. But the great difficulty to be faced was the crossing of the mountain ranges into Mid-Cumberland. The crossing of the cultivated area

had to be done by night, and then the cargoes hidden until darkness came again. Government officers of that period were rarely mountain wanderers, but the astute Moses knew that if the pass by which his goods went east were detected a small picket could close it against him for all time. My grandmother, who knew nothing of West Cumberland, asserted that Moses kept his liquor in store beneath a church. If so, the edifice would undoubtedly be that at Ennerdale Bridge. There are ancient stories that ghosts used to be plentiful thereabouts on nights at dark o' moon, and an equally ancient parenthesis that after a ghostly visitation the farmers flocked to church, each with two bottles of large capacity, vessels that were filled with rum, or whisky or brandy at ridiculously small cost.

"Again, at a suitable time, the ponies were brought up to the church and their panniers loaded. From Ennerdale Bridge there is a kind of track south of Ehen, which follows with an easy upward sweep the course of the dale. By the time Pillar Mountain is reached this track is fairly high up the breast of the fell, and swings easily into and across Black Sail Pass. At just beyond this the first part of the Sledgate begins. But to Moses it was not a question of sledges at all; a few minutes' consideration will show that the lower 'gate' (gait or way) is suitable for his pack animals. I've often thought of the old sinner piling his poor ponies along on a foul, dark night in October, the wind howling in the rocks above, the becks rattling below,

around, everywhere, a mirk like death, and the situation not a little dangerous. For it is quite possible to have an accident on the Sledgate in darkness. Now, rock-climbers are not usually antiquarians. For years the Gate had been in the stories of the Borrowdale and Ennerdale folks and parts of its course pointed out, but the early pioneers who explored the Ennerdale face made two discoveries. The first was a cave—a great recess in the crags roofed in with fallen stones—which was promptly called the Smugglers' Cave. It is not easy to get at, and Moses must have had a fair knowledge of rockcraft if he made it his regular haunt. The other was the loose stone wall which terminates an upward terrace in these bleak Ennerdale crags. There is little vestige of wood or turf nowadays, as one examines the ruin, but no doubt at one time it was roofed, and formed a comfortable cabin for Moses' watchman. Nothing could stir in Ennerdale, or come over the passes from Wasdale or Buttermere or Borrowdale, without being very visible to the sentinel, and so cunningly is both cabin and approach located that many ascents of the crags had been made before it was discovered. If the outlook desired to know whether the Wasdale valley was clear, it would not be a serious thing to thread his way through the rocks westward, and then to stand by Moses' Finger in the dip between Great Gable and Kirkfell and command an easy view of the two routes to Wastwater.

"The Sledgate crosses the Ennerdale face of

Gable at a great height, entering Aaron Slack, the hollow between the northern and southern Gables, almost on a level. Here, indeed, a sled might be used; in fact, I have no doubt that the haunts on Gable Crag were used as depots from which the heavy orders for contraband from the Lakeland gentry could be easily supplied. Anyway, the traffic, if the condition of the track be any indication, must have been fairly considerable. From Wind Gap, or the head of Aaron Slack, the Sledgate descends into Borrowdale, and is lost in the civilisation there.

" I wonder if there is any record of Moses' adventures anywhere. One of my old stories seems to indicate that he was on the coast when Paul Jones made his descent on Whitehaven—' there were a lot of furren ships an' fighters there'—and another that he was accustomed to float his goods ashore beneath his fishing-boat while the revenue cutter stood by.

" Was the Sledgate used by others than Old Moses? I should think not during his own day, but at a later date, when illicit distilleries became fashionable, there is little doubt that one ' worm ' at least turned out cheap liquor somewhere in Upper Ennerdale. And what more suitable place than in and about the cabin on the face of Great Gable? "

Space has run out, and time, too, is failing, but there is little doubt that the history of Moses and his Sledgate might be worthy some little trouble.

(*c*) The Raffle

One wonders if, in any of our more secluded dales, the raffle in its ancient form still exists. It is certainly many a year since one heard of "shakkin'" to decide the prize list. The police, one was told, frowned heavily upon the game as they did upon the more trivial "Wheel of Fortune" at our village fairs, and so it died out. But there was an individuality about the old method which is entirely absent from the numbered ticket substitute so dear, we are told, to the heart of the charitable-bazaar worker. It was a great evening when the cobbler called two of us from our play to "shak" as he called it. But as on that evening I consistently threw "threes" instead of "fives" and "sixes," it was long before I was invited again.

The cobbler was large, red-faced, with side whiskers: so good a man at his trade that he never was short of work for himself and apprentice. He shod the farmers and their servants equally well with hand-made, hand-sewn work — twenty-five shillings was his price for a pair of working boots, and this price included freedom to frequent the informal social club which assembled every winter night at his shop. And it was at this gathering that most of the "breks" or horse-play in the countryside were hatched, and that all the raffles were organised.

"Wha's lads er tha?" queried a grim, bearded farmer seated on the cobbler's bench. He had chased us from his best meadow that afternoon,

and we were none too wishful for his proximity. However, he seemed to have forgotten our iniquities as well as his shouted threat to " Brek yer necks if yo' cu' aboot here agen."

The cobbler named us as our fathers' sons : in the old dales children rarely had individuality to their elders. They were the eldest, second and so on down to the youngest son or daughter until something occurred to make them worthy of distinction.

With our entry the rattle of tongues ceased : it was the signal for the raffle to begin. " Noo than, Anthony, t' first raffle. T' heead prize is t' leg o' mutton. Gie's t' first naem ? " Anthony was the farmer whose sheep had met with an accident while being " dogged " for some trespass, and this creature provided the meat courses of the entertainment. Certain portions had, however, been sold, leaving us with a miscellaneous assortment of pieces. " Jo Broon," announced the man hunched up at the table with various sheets of paper in front of him. Joe Brown was present : one remembers starting back as a big hairy fist was rapidly swung down from overhead and grasped the dicebox and cubes. " Noo, what's it gaan to be ? Yan thra o' t' three, er three thras o' t' yan." " Neah, neah, mun; we mun hae summat like fairation. Three thras o' aw t' three ah want." There was a rapid fire of grunts and " ayes," so the cobbler gave it " Three thras o' aw t' three. Gang on. T' winner o' t' leg's oot, and saes ivvery udder winner until we git doon to t' clock. Then we'll aw start agen."

The dice rattled in the box so long that Jo was repeatedly urged to "Doon wi' 't," but replied, "Neah, neah, lad, they're nin ruddy yut." At last, with a resounding thump, they went down: the cobbler, who was the umpire, called "Six-fower-two: Joe lad, thoo's starten weel." Joe grunted as he reached for the ivories. "Esta gitten twal doon to meh, Ant'ny?" "Aye." "Then, coont them, Jack." There was a mere swish of the box and the cubes rolled on to the bare board. "Yan-yan-three. That'll nivver dew." "Ah'll hae a gradely shak this time." Slowly, solemnly, he waved his great arm about (all his evolutions were over my head) and then he "'livered 'em" so gently that the cubes merely slid out of the box. "Six-five-six: by gum, Joe, thoo sud hae hed anudder like that." There was a general buzz of conversation as to the merits of "Thirty-fower," while Anthony entered up the score. "Noo, Jack Prickett." From the opposite side of the table a hand came down, and a vigorous rattling began. The solitary lamp which the cobbler used had been placed on the table, and everything above its shade was in darkness. So what manner of men they were who were taking part in the raffle we could not really see. Jack's three throws were luckless —he scored but twenty in all. At the next name there was no answer, so Anthony said, "Gie it tull yan o' t' lads." Being nearest I got the cup and was instructed in the art of "thra'in'!" My arm was seized by a genial giant, whose help I resented,

as he seemed to think I was not yet a man of ten, but a mere child. In due time "turn it ower" was called, but nothing better than three threes was the result. A second cast was most remarkably alike, and "three-three-four" was called for my third attempt. It took some time to reckon up my score, Anthony persisting that it was really thirty-one. In a few seconds my companion had the dice, and proved a most capable artist. He had two sixes in every throw, and rarely less than three on the other cube. His first attempt secured the leg of mutton for an absent farm-servant. "Ah'll gie him fower shillin' for't," said a non-entrant to the raffle. "Hand ower thi brass," said Anthony, "he'll tek that for't, ah's seur."

Now things went quicker, the less interested simply swishing their numbers down as fast as they could: the married men, as became their responsibility, going carefully in order to save at least entrance money. Soon, however, every one's interest in the mutton waned, and as the numbers of prizeless diminished progress was indeed rapid. "What's yer hurry, lads?" said one old farmer; "ah mind yan raffle at Garnett Brig whar they tuk fower hoors to get settled which on 'em had to hev a roond o' beef—an' ther' was aboot forty udder prizes. That was a neet. They'd sent a barrel doon fra t' Ploo, and we finished it amang us."

In about an hour there was nothing of the prize list left but the sheep's head and similar trifles—and Anthony jumped up and said, "By gum lads,

let's git this ower. Here," to me, " thee tak' t' sheep's yed—thoo's desarved it by missin' ivvery shak thoo's hed; an'," to my companion, " there's a basket wi' t' udder things. Awa' haem wi' baeth o' ye." And mightily pleased were we to go.

It was some time before I was got into another raffle, but then my luck changed, and sixes were almost as plentiful as the less figures had been on the other occasion. Bill Baines had been luckless enough that in turning a fine heifer into its proper place in the byre (and so restoring peace to the herd) he hit the creature behind the horns—with fatal consequences. So the inevitable " beef-day " and afterwards raffle. It was a summer evening, and we were not dependent on the cobbler's lamp. Though the raffle had been but twenty-four hours on the way, a large number of tickets had been taken up —so large the crowd that after twenty big men had crowded into a room where ten were two too many, the cobbler called to his friend the blacksmith, whose shop adjoined, to allow the " shakkin' " to take place there. So out we scurried into the pelting rain—it was the wettest night that summer. The anvil formed a table for the dice: Anthony, who was a sort of permanent secretary to these affairs, sat on the open hearth with his papers, and the cobbler stood again as umpire. The mode of the game was slightly varied in view of the large number of prizes. But first Bill had to speak and tell us that the raffle had brought in enough to pay for the heifer—for which he was glad. The

first name called was that of an absentee, so the cup came to me. "Wha's that lad?" was again asked, but it was my previous record of casting threes that was mentioned instead of the name. "Six-five-six," said Jack; "by gum thy luck's changed." Again, "six-five-five"—"Thirty-three awreddy," marvelled the farmers, "and a thra to gang." And my next throw was "six-six-six." There was a combined roar of "Fifty-yan," and much clapping on my back, as though the deed were a great merit. My father was second, and threw a bad second indeed. Anthony spoke in the momentary silence: "By gum, Jim, but I'd leather that young whelp, if I wor thee." The scheme this time was to take one set of throws through the list of entries, weeding out every one who threw over forty for first pick of the beef, and then making up another competition among the "also-rans." That raffle, scores were low on the whole, and my cast of "fifty-one" was an easy winner. There was some dispute in the second competition as to whether I was to throw for an entrant who had gone home; the "Ayes" had it, and my figure was "fifty-two," my father getting half-way on the list. Then came back my "master"—it was old-fashioned kindliness for which the dalesman is famous. "What, did t' lad thra me fifty-two? Now ah *wod* hae liked to see him dew it. Ah wod, whativver. Here, lad, thoo mun tek this haem. Thi mudder can dew better wi' it ner ah can."

The same night our little hamlet was disturbed by a loud crash, the running out of our neighbours, and some distant laughter. It was another manifestation of the kindliness of the olden days. Some one had mentioned that Tom was down with " his sciatics," so instantly the young bloods saw a generous purpose. A pile of meat which they had won was put on Tom's doorstep, then the ringleader, from across the road, let fly with a stone at the door. Tom's wife and boys, rushing out, fell over the meat —hence the merriment. It might be " light come, light go," with many of those who in the olden days spent a few sixpences per winter on the raffles, but no one in the hamlet wanted for meat the day afterwards. One morning a knock came to a sick man's door, and, as was the custom in those days, then the door was pushed open. The folks only saw the cobbler's apprentice, as he pushed in a parcel and said, " Fra t' raffle," ere he ran away. Questions were useless—but there was love, real love behind those actions. The hamlet may be better when there is an institute and a billiard-table within half a mile, yet one recalls with a sigh days when the discussion in the cobbler's shop was the only means of rounding off the day.

(*d*) About Some Fortunes

At the moment, I am not concerned either with the ethics or the methods of fortune-telling. Most of us are superstitious, and at the back of our minds

are half-convinced that there may be "something in it." In the old days there were less ashamed of their ignorance, and the "dumb wife" was a regular feature of village fair or "merry night." Many an ancient couple have I set laughing merrily—he with a hearty "ho, ho," though maybe the voice had a little quaver in it, and she, dimpling and rosy, with a more sedate merriment—at the recollection of days when, sheepish, devoted courters, they passed into the tent or caravan or inner room to have their "planets" told.

My first fortune was told under curious circumstances. Indeed, the incident smacks very much of George Borrow. A band of gipsies had been camped for some days on the level summit of one of our high road passes. The children, as usual, had swarmed out to beg as the coaches and carriages passed. As I came up a small child, running in behind one conveyance, fell and might have been run over. There was five yards to spare in front of the leaders in the next coach, and the horses were at the walk, so that there was nothing splendid or daring in picking up the wee mite. Coachee rather too forcibly put my feelings: "Those . . . [bairns] are a . . . nuisance, tumbling right in front of my hosses!" And a German lady laboriously pronounced sentence: "It verry brave and glor-ious wass," before Coachee, with a wave of his whip to me, sent the horses along. There had been a volley of shouts to and from the gipsy camp, and now, with the child in my arms, I was the centre of a

chattering crowd of Romany men, women and children, units of the first, doubled by the seconds, and quadrupled at least by the thirds. It was soon borne in on me that I was accredited with a deed of no small importance. Different men, one a big, burly chap fit to eat me, took my elbows, and with gentle force I was conducted to the central tent of the group. I don't remember hearing much English, nor, when I made out the presence of an ancient crone, smoking a short black pipe in the back of this tent, was I greatly impressed. But the others spoke hurriedly and to the point apparently in their Romany, their remarks cut into by her whip-like queries, and then the old lady deigned to address me. My bodyguard back-stepped, and I was allowed the full force of her shrill but apparently benevolent remarks. The situation was not without its humour. The old lady, seeing that I didn't understand a single word, screamed something loudly, and the chatter behind me instantly ceased. A gorgeously dressed lady of a younger generation (by the way, smoking a small black cheroot) came to the front and began to act as interpreter. Not being a novelist writing my reminiscences, nor yet the hero of a novel, I have long since forgotten her exact words, but they should have been majestic—I had saved an important member of the family, the seventh child of a seventh child repeated seven times, and the head of the family thanked me in a farrago of laudatory terms linked up with rotten grammar and a garnishing of slang. What would

I accept as reward? A bag of money was produced from somewhere, and a stream of yellow coins slowly trickled on to a red cotton handkerchief. When I had convinced the interpreter that the whole business was so much nonsense to me, she was a bit perturbed and began to explain that the old dame was a sort of queen and would be affronted if I did not accept reward. I replied "bosh." There was an interchange of speeches (by the way, I am sure that the regal grandmother understood English, but did not deign to speak in it), and as a final offer the old lady was made to suggest that I might have my fortune told. The words were first pronounced in Romany, then in English, the interpreter adding that it was a great honour indeed for a queen to offer. She was descended from Lot's wife or Eve, I'm not sure which, or was it the Queen of Sheba? As a thunderstorm was breaking just at the moment over the fells, I was not sorry of an excuse for shelter. And here is my recollection of the next half-hour.

The tent was cleared, the old gipsy moved her stool so that she sat, a bent, old witch of a figure, between me and the triangle of doorway; to right, to left of her, the darkness of storm-clouds hiding distant lake and hills, then the silver trees of lightning, the grey waves of rain, the final clearing of the air, the distant bar of sunshine, and then the clear bright sun of afternoon. And the thunder grumbled and rattled and crashed and echoed the while the queen spoke slow her readings of my

hands and face, her companion in low voice interpreting to me : " You may hope to live long, for the days of ill-health are behind. You may hope to rise in the world, but it will be slowly, for you have too much pride and will not bend where you should. You will never be lucky in money matters, picking up money which you have not sown, but you will never be without money or dis-hon-our-ab-ly " (I remember that word well, every syllable being pronounced separately) " in debt. Whatever you want, you will have to work for and work hard for, but you will get it in good time. Hills and rocks and mountains, mountains and rocks and torrent sides, will be your pleasure and your fortune, but not for gold, not for gold."

And at this point the old lady ceased ; she seemed in a rapt reverie, and the younger one gripped my elbow, saying softly, " Come : there is no more that tongue can utter." In two minutes I was out of sight of the encampment, swinging down the rain-washed road on my homeward journey.

Some years later a lady who had studied the cards tried to tell my fortune thereby, but the revelations were so black against me that she declined to go on—she was afraid, she said.

In a lavishly appointed gipsy van, bright silver and brass everywhere, sat a lady, opulent of gold chain and gold-brocaded dress. She had followed the telling of fortunes as a business for many years, and was not unwilling, on the ordinary consideration, to read my hand and face. I chaffed her at

the end about the things she had not told me. "I had a man in yesterday who lives with a rope round his neck. He will be hanged for sure, but the evil he is to do is not in his heart yet"—which reminded me of rather an opposite sort of thing, heard long ago in a country public-house in Devon. The morning John Lee, condemned for the Babbacombe mystery, was to die on the scaffold three of his friends entered the place: "And, mister, sat as there, and there, and one in the very place you are," pointed out Boniface impressively; "John Lee is to hang at Exeter this morning," had said mine host. "Nay, nay, he will not die. We're just back from seeing the gipsies about it, and we've saved him all right," was the confident reply. And of what happened at Exeter gaol is now a matter of history. The bolt was drawn thrice, but the drop did not work, and John Lee was afterwards reprieved.

But my lady of the silver van could tell me more of her gipsy magic. To the men she left the magic of horses and wild creatures, but to herself the lore of human life. "We can influence Fate," she declared, "but do not do so. The dangers are too great." I asked her what manner of questions were asked, and she replied, "None whatever need be asked, for I know the matter the moment we are face to face." However, she obliged me with a grossly flattering character and future, and caused me to spell the Christian name of my future wife—which was no wonder after all.

The most recent experience of fortune-telling was by a woman not clearly of gipsy origin, who called at the back door to sell or beg or work magic. The police rightly frown on this sort of general traffic, and the preamble to a "reading" has to be rushed through. "LetmetellyourfortunemissIcantellbyyourfaceitshouldbeagoodonenevertrustadarkmanorafairwomanfortheystandbetweenyouandgoodluckyouarenotmarriedyetbutyouwillsoongoonajourneyandmeetthedarkmanasyoushouldavoidandthenyouwill——" Slam went the door; my good wife is not too pleased by such vapourings.

(*e*) The Message of the Flax

or

The Old Clay House

It was a bright, clear and cool morning, the sort of day made for walking. Yet, right in the middle of my ramble, I was destined to lose time. He was a grim, wiry old chap, and the way in which he kept in front showed that though his years were many his pains were few. When at last I caught him up, he was looking over a gate at a small enclosure—more like the old-time village pound than a field or even garden. I spoke him, and his answer gave me halt. "Do you see that over there?" Of course I did. And what is more, during the preceding months I had seen the green

stems in spring and a cluster of dingy flowers in summer. "Yes, linseed; if you pick one you will find them in good shape—pith, fibre, inner skin, hard case and green outer skin all complete." "Eh, what's that? Dosta mean to tell me that thoo knas owt aboot lin—ther's nut yan in a' t' fell-side as does." He spoke with animation, and I saw there was a tale to tell. My pet sin is wasting time telling tales, or hearing other folks tell them—the latter is really my favourite, though my wife says it is the former. Had I been silent, there's many a grand tale I would have missed. I must, however, tone down the dialect of the old man's tale.

"Aye, lad, that's lin fast enough. An' what's more, that's the spot where my mother planted it nigh on a hundred year sin. Thou sees in them days it was quite like enough when a fellow and his lass wanted to wed ther was no house-room in the dale for them. So-a what mud they do but hev a bit of a spot built for theirsel's. At sic a time and sic a spot the folks would cum together, aw ready for work. Some wad bring their spades, some their barrows, one brought maybe a bearing of straw and another some ling for the thatch, and they wad all sow in and hev a clay daubing. The bettermer mak of houses, the farms and sic like, were built of stone, but t' shepherds and t' hinds had to be content with less. I mind weel my mother telling me about their clay daubing. T' clerk had called it at both her kirk and me father's, and there

was like to be a githering. Lang afore leet they were on t' way fra Cummerkelt, and t' folks fra our dale war none behindhand. T' very first thing was to clear off t' sod and level t' spot a bit. Then them as wer bringing t' clay fra t' put up yonder [a faint s ar on the hill's end still showed the place] banged it doon and t' others levelled it oot. Ther was a nice stampin' on't, specially by t' lasses, for her as went into t' clay aboon t' clog tops wor like to be weddt seun. My mother said t' capers that day fairly beat her—it seemed that all t' lasses in Cummerland wor wanten to be weddt. When t' floor had been weel stampt on t' men began to build t' walls—or rather to fill 'em. Boards were put up about two foot apart, and t' clay, weel wetted and mixed wi' a bit of straw, was teemed [poured] in. It was quite an art to get these walls evenly built, but a good man could make 'em so as they would turn weather for fifty year. As ther was plenty of help it wasn't lang afore t' walls were well on, an' then everybody turned to to get the beams and rafters together to hold up t' thatch. Noo, my mother said, that t' wark on t' riggin'-beam [the main timber] had to be done by t' man hissel, and that my father had it ready, so aw that hed to be done was to get it into place. At one clay daubing, away ower by Coutram, there was nae riggin' ready—t' poor fellow nivver hed any luck, and was transported for sheep-stealing when his brother it was that had gotten away with a lot of ewes off t' fell. At midday they all stopped

work—and of course my mother had to go round and ask every one to have something to eat with them—but it was the rule at a clay daubing that t' folks should bring their own provender, and not a bite would any of them have fra her hands. In t' afternoun mair o' t' womenfolk came up to t' daubing, and of course they had all to 'ave a hand in it, even if it was nobbut handing up a few straws to t' thatchers. Lang afore it was dark the hoose was finished. It was a queer bit o' a spot, for it hed nae glass and nae window-frames. They were put in afore I wor born, but my father used to tell me that every night at darkening a shutter of birch wattle had to be put into t' window-hole. Of course, after this clay daubing come the wedding. And an old Cumberland wedding was a big affair, if it were among the folks that had brass. At the big farms a wedding feast might easily last three days. But my folks had to start wi' less nor that, though they started a good bit better nor some. I've heard tell of a bride leaving nearly all her clothes outside the church so that her debts could not hold against her after she were married. My mother used to say that both t' parson and t' clerk were sober at the wedding—a thing not known for years, and that the race from the church to her home was won by a deaf-and-dumb man—which she seemed to think boded her no luck. It was always the custom to race either on horse or foot, the bride presenting one of her ribbons to the winner. And there was another queer custom kept up in those

days. When the bride retired, her waiting-woman took one of her stockings, and came back into the festivities. Turning her back on the assembly, she flung this stocking over her shoulder, and whoever was struck with it was accounted the next one to be married. My mother always said it was queer that that stocking should just hit the lad whose lass had been more than ankle deep at the daubing.

" But I was telling thee about the lin. I remember when, instead of being just an untidy tush, it was a fine patch and my mother was real proud of it. You see when her and my father went round asking for first seed for their garden (it was unlucky for any one to buy this) it was the first thing she had given. I can see her yet watching father cut it with a hand sickle, and dashing t' stalks to bits against a wooden door. Then they went away to t' lin mill, where they were soaked and smashed about until the threads next t' pith came away easy from the soft mass. Then in a big bundle the lint came back to us, and my mother's spinning-wheel sang all winter in t' neuk by the fire. She was a good spinner, and her lint thread was famous in the fell-side. I have often wondered where that wheel went to after her day. Thou sees, when I was fourteen I was sent off to Lunnon to my uncle to earn my living and to become a great man." Here the old man laughed. " I didn't do much good up there : sheep are more in my line than merchants, and at t' first chance I came right back

again into t' fells. But they were t' far fells near down to the Duddon, and for twenty year I never really got home. And when I did, well, there was nobody of the name left. The daubing had been turned into a shippon, the bit of a herb garden had gone to ruin that I kent so fair. Since then I have lived hereabouts, and have watched the house drop to bits. There was t' time when a new tenant ploughed up the bit of garden and planted potatoes, but bit by bit the ground has gone back to the fell and it's hard to tell where the house really stood. The doorsteps and lintels have gone long ago, and t' clay floor is gradually crumbling away and getting overgrown."

At this I left him : he was back in the company of those who had gone so long ago and did not heed my presence. But the incident, though many a year old, has remained with me, and I can again see, as I saw that morning, the quiet, grim old man in his well-worn broadcloth, looking, over the gate which he dared not pass, at the site of his early home. All there was change, but beyond it I, less concerned, could look over miles of heaving country to where a blue streak showed the Solway.

THE NIGHT SHEPHERD

Old Anthony, seated in the chimney-corner, used to charm us with old-time stories of the fells, and rarely, though he was past ninety, could one suspect that he was mistaken of any point of observation. He might have remembered the days when death was the inevitable punishment of sheep-stealing. And this is a story of his, told in the peat-reek while a big storm howled round the steading.

"One never hears of a night shepherd being caught driving somebody else's sheep, that's certain. But I remember a case which came pretty near it. Sheep, a score at a time, had been missed all summer, and it was with long faces that we brought down the flocks for winter. Everybody was badly short —even the parson's lot had not been left alone. And that roused him as I never saw parson roused before or since. He called us all to church on the Sunday and preached a sermon against the thief which beat all we ever heard, and he had psalms and hymns and Bible readings to match. But the sermon didn't stop it, for the very next morning parson was another eighteen short, even though they were pasturing in the churchyard. The dale was up in arms, and every night shepherds watched the fell passes and the roads. The parson went quite mad, and put three or four of the waistrels of the dale into gaol, for he was a magistrate, but that didn't better things at all. Aye, one might have thought it impossible to drive silently a score of sheep,

but they went, however. What 'mazed us most, was that every now and then a dozen or so sheep were found wandering about the fell-sides—they had been missed two or three days, but there they were as if nothing had chanced to them. My brother Dick came to me, and said—

"'Anthony, where have those sheep of ours been?'

"'How do I know, thou calf-scope?'

"'I tell thee they haven't been far away.'

"'Shaff on such rubbish, anybody can tell that.'

"'Then tell me where they have been? There's been somebody on the road every night, others at the dale foot, and one or two at every pass, and yet —where and how do they go?'

"As that question had been bothering the lot of us since shearing-time, it wasn't likely that it could be answered off-hand now. But, however, one thing struck me—and it had struck every man in the dale weeks before, so they said—if the sheep were really going, and who could doubt it? it must be by some track which we never used, and which nobody was watching. Next morning was fine for January, and I was off before light on to the tops. There had been a bit of snow through the night, and I was sure that if I walked from one end of the fells right round to the other, I would find the tracks of any sheep that had been moved. I walked my hardest up and down those hills, but never a track could I see. It was that dark afore I got to the top of Steulbreak that I couldn't go on, so I made my ways as quick as I could into the bottom. And in the lownd still of the night I heard the

blating of sheep. I waited about a bit, and it came in fits and starts, never clear enough to make sure, so I was sure my ears had played me false, and followed on my way home. I told Dick what I had heard, but to be sure he wouldn't believe me. Beside, at darkening a thick mist had come right down to the door of the house, and it was little good trying to look for anything in that. So we put it off to morning, although Dick was certain sure that if I had heard aught, it was either a boggle or somebody's sheep down in the pastures. When morning came it was raining hard, so we didn't get away. That night nobody's sheep went a-wanting, so Dick thought me rare and silly. But mappen I wasn't. The first fine day saw me away up the other side of the dale, to see if anything could pass over the fells there. And till about dinner-time I could see nothing which looked as though sheep had passed. There was never a print on either peat or soft place. I got to the top of Steulbreak—it was a bonny, clear day, never a cloud to be seen, the ground hard, but not a bit of snow—when I came across a lock of fresh wool. That made certain sure this way was being used, but how, without a balloon, could any one get a flock up? Steulbreak crags are straight up, and nobody has ever climbed them. And the way I had come was that steep and narrow that no sheep could be driven up in the dark, of that I was sure. Then I broke out into a sweat—if anybody was bad enough to bring sheep up there they would be ill folks to meet when one was alone. I looked all

around, but there was nobody, and all the way from there to the pass, where I came across my brother, I looked mighty sharp about me. Sheep up Steulbreak crags—why, Dick laughed fit to split. 'Thou great ninny, this watching's sent thee quite mad.' 'All right, Dick,' says I, 'but isn't that fresh wool?' 'Why, of course, but it might be taken up by a raven or a buzzard, or a dowk, or even a fox, for there's plenty of dead sheep lying about the hill-side.' But as we were making a dive across the breast of the hill instead of wandering around by the fell-road, we came to the spot where I had stopped on the other night, and it was Dick that heard the blating of sheep. And he stuck there near on half an hour trying to make out where the sound was, for even a shepherd is often puzzled in a deep, narrow and rocky dale like ours. Then we came on home.

"Next morning there had been snow on the tops, and Dick, as keen as me, rushed off to the top of Steulbreak as soon as it was light. But just as we were climbing the last steep bit, a squall of wind and snow came on, and we were glad to get down again alive. If there had been any tracks, that snow would have covered them up. We had said nothing to anybody about what we suspected, and since the parson had locked up Joe Swainson the poacher three days gone, there had been no sheep missing. Everybody thought that Joe had a big hand in the job, but, however, another night a dozen sheep were missing out of a pasture about half-way down the dale. So it wasn't Joe it seemed. Dick and I had spent every good day about the fell

but could find nothing more, and were getting tired of what looked like a wild-goose chase. However, with this next lot going, we set off like deer to the top of the fell—and there was nought to be seen at all. Dick walked down to the edge, where it falls straight down to the dale, just to look at where there had once been a wall to keep the sheep from getting down a ledge and into danger. After a bit I went as well, and it struck me to follow this ledge down a bit. In a few yards I found tracks of a man on the soft bits of soil—the ledge had been passed lately. It didn't take many minutes to be out of that. I didn't fancy meeting a body on that bit—it was less than a yard wide and sloped off so that one could see nearly down into the dale bottom from between one's toes. Dick was waiting.

" ' Why, man, thou's white as a clout. Has thou seen a boggle? ' But he was nervous as well as I when I told him what I had struck on. And we off down home as fast as we dare go, but we padded the top bit of rock with some moss, so that we could see to-morrow if anybody had passed. I wanted to keep right away from the crags—one couldn't see anything up there, but a stone could easily land on us, and we would be killed. Dick wasn't unwilling either—then he saw something white come down the rocks. ' Hold away home, Ant., and let us get guns and some more folk. There's surely somebody been murdered and stripped and thrown down.' Didn't we go! And when my father wanted us to go back, I can assure you we weren't sharp on the job. But, however, with

a few neighbours with guns we felt safer, and off we went. When we got to the bottom of the crags there was a dead sheep there, and it was smashed up a sight to see. However, Willie Dixon knew it at once as one of his lot which had been taken the night before, and we felt sure we were on the right line at last. Why, there was for ever of hoof-tracks right up to the crags, and they all turned in at one rive, which looked like a steep staircase for a bit, but narrowed right out to nothing at the top. Up this we all climbed, looking out a bit sharp for falling stones. When we got maybe a hundred feet up, there was a ledge out to the right on which there were marks of sheep—and then all ended in straight cliff above and below, and a wall of rock in front. This was the ' sneck posset ' with a vengeance. But Dick had gotten a bit of his pluck back, and found a way up the other side of the gully for a bit, then crossed right above our heads, where it had come narrow. I went up and found him on a goodish bit of a ledge which looked likely to take us along the front of the crags for a bit. With guns in our hands we crept whishtly round the corner. There was nobody in sight, but right below, in a hole in the crags, were packed a dozen sheep. Three sides they were held in by crags, and on the other a wall had been built—it hadn't been quite high enough to stop Willie Dixon's ewe, which had trailed a clog for a year to stop its jumping fences into other folk's land. This, then, was where the sheep were kept, but how they were to be taken away still beat us. Anyway, if we

kept near, we were pretty sure to catch the night shepherds. We crept carefully back, then clambered down to the big ledge. We didn't tell everybody what we had seen, so they guessed that there was no way on from the corner. But after we had got a bit down the fell we told father and Willie Dixon and a couple or so more, and arranged to come back as soon as it was dark, and with a rope get down to where the sheep were. There we should wait until daylight or the night shepherds came.

" It was a ticklish job groping up the big stair of rocks, and a worse getting up the side of the ghyll, but in about an hour the six of us were on the little ledge. The rope first let down Dick and then myself. Now began the worst job of all. The night shepherds knew these rocks and we didn't, and we hadn't the slightest idea which way they would come down. They might be sure of a warm reception if they came the stairway, for Willie Dixon was there with his gun nearly full of bullets and old iron.

" After groping away on the dowly rocks for holds, it nearly made one jump to see how clear the other side of the dale was lit up with the moonlight, and the great dark crag above us stuck up like a bad thing into the bright sky. It was enough to flay Old Nick. And it was cold. At first the sheep made as much stir as they could, then they quieted down. And, gun in hand, we waited. Time seemed to stand still.

" Then, when we were that cramped that we near screamed with pain, we heard a scraping, faint and far, and one or two little bits of stone came rattling down. We felt at our rope and there was

no weight on it, so it wasn't father or one of the others coming down. The night shepherd seemed to come very slowly, but in a bit he came into sight right above us. He was just like a big bat clinging on the rocks. The last bit he came like a shot, landing on top of the sheep, and not seeing us at all. He seized hold of one by the fleece, and in a second was off up the straight crags with it. 'Next time,' whispered Dick. And sure enough when he came swinging down again Dick got his legs and plumped him down head first among the sheep. What happened next I don't rightly know. I collared the chap by the neck to help Dick, and the sheep were jumping about and blating fearful. Then a bit of the wall tippled over, and away the lot of them rushed sixty feet on to the rocks below, and were mashed to bits. That we were still fast to our rope hindered our following. As for the night shepherd, we had him all right, and in a minute my father slid down our rope. He could hear us though we didn't hear him—and we roped up our man. We didn't know at all who we had gotten.

"The sheep-stealer's rope had caught in a bit of a rock, and although his mates might be pulling above, it didn't budge an inch. That likely saved us from having our man lifted up out of our hands while we were wrestling with him. Then my father looked up and, by gum, right atween us and the sky was another fellow creeping down the rope. 'What's up, Rob?' he said, 'couldn't thou get the rope loose?' Father had him by the legs by this, and down he came plump on top of us. Three to

one isn't good odds for any man, and he was soon beside his mate. Whether a third man would have ventured himself I can't tell, for next minute Willie Dixon let drive with his charge of bullets and old iron right up the crags. He had seen something stirring high up and wasn't waiting for them to get nearer. We heard some shouting up there, but nothing else happened, and in a while we lowered our two prisoners, fast as they were, right down the rocks to the bottom. We came down the long sheep-ropes, leaving them fastened to the rocks till morning.

" Of course, as parson was a magistrate, we had to take the men there—but hector and threaten as he would, they would tell nothing. Sheep-stealing was a hanging matter, one said, and he wasn't seeing more hanged chaps than he could help. But in a little talk I had with them, they were quite decent, though never a name would they give. It seemed that they got the sheep one night up to the crags, then another night came down the rope and carried the sheep one by one over the rocky summit of Steulbreak, leaving no mark that we could follow. But where the sheep went after that they would not tell.

" When they came to be tried, we all went to the Assizes, and our men stood quiet and would say nothing until the old judge got mad and sentenced them to be hung. A lot of our dalesfolk would have brought them back here and fastened them up on the crags, but, after all, the old judge said they had to die outside the county gaol. And that was the end of our worst night shepherds."

BRIDESON'S CROSS

FAR up the mountain, the Boy pointed out a flat surface of rock so encroached upon by grass and moss as only to be faintly visible from the distance of a few yards. For years a visitor to this mountain pass, one had not noticed the place before. "This," said the youngster, "is Brideson's Cross." But why the name? Some waif of the fells had been found here dead, that was all. In stories of stress and storm told round the peat-fires of the dale, the tragedy was but a dim memory, all particulars of time had long since been lost, but the names and dates scratched deep into this smooth slab were proof that for a century at least this place had had some individuality, was even a recognised landmark. In listening to tales of the old-time, one has to add carefully many particulars, even an atmosphere to the blunt, unlaboured narratives. In a hundred years our dales have changed much. Wheat was then profitably grown on the most elevated farms, and the plough gave employment to thrice the present population, yet the mountains were a trackless waste to most of the dalesfolk. Sheep were reared—of an inferior, weakly race—in a negligent sort of way; the wheat made so much

more revenue that mutton and wool were a secondary affair. The sheep were, of course, semi-wild, only knowing the shepherd and his dogs at shearing-time and when the approach of winter gave the call "back from the fells." Miles upon miles of upland was absolutely unfenced; the commons were open to all, and the sheep-stealer flourished though the hangman's noose was usually his end. In understanding old fireside yarns, one has therefore to remember that beyond the walled enclosures the mountains were untracked, unvisited wilderness over which the scraggy sheep roamed pretty much as they chose. A man who went astray on the fell was in a dangerous position compared with to-day, when wire-fences, walls and tracks criss-cross the uplands in every direction.

Who Brideson was, one cannot quite make out. The name is not a local one, and the ancestors of our little hamlet, Isaac (aged ninety) and George (who was only eighty-four), used to wrangle many an hour on the topic. "I tell thee—Brideson was a Scotch soldier: didn't they bury him down at the church, and wasn't his body lifted years and years after, and taken away to Scotland?" But George will have it that Brideson was no more than a wandering lunatic, who hit on the expedient of baffling his pursuers by reversing his boots—he did it so well that help could not reach him when he was known to be lost on the fell. "And as for thy Scotch soldier, Isaac, thou's wrong altogether, for it was dozens of years after poor, daft Brideson

died that he come into the valley, and by the bottom end at that. Shaff on sich like stories." "Shaff, says ye, George? Thou should be shammed of thyself speaking back to an old man like that," once rejoined warmly old Isaac's Mally, who was about six months younger and twenty years more youthful than her husband. "Why-a now, I'll tell you both of ye the real true story as it was telled me by my great-grandmother as lived to be upwards of a hundred and eleven year old, as anybody can see on her tombstone in the churchyard. (Tho', mind ye, she isn't buried anywhere near her tombstone—the dale was flooded for over a week after she died, so they buried her under a tree in the orchard, and parson gave leave (or they took it) to put a blue stone up to her in the churchyard.)

"It was in the dark days at end of winter that it all happened. For over a week there was nowt but storm, rain and hail and snow, sometimes separate but mostly what together. Then come a fine day. The sky was red at midnight and all as clear as a bell, and the sun rose up without a cloud. But for all that it was so bright it went colder and colder, and by noon every still bit of water was a mask of ice, and the sun looked like a brass groat (that was a fourpenny-bit, you know). But there was never a cloud anywhere to be seen, and the becks were simply roo-aring down the dale. Now Willie Brideson was a sort of bettermer mak of farmer's son, and what! the first fine day he mud be over the fells a-courting the daughter at

a nice farm in the next dale. So-a off he wad set, no matter what the shepherds said: he was frightened none of the boggles, not he, and the night-fire as clings round a man's feet and pulls him down to drown in the bog was nowt but maapment anyhow. But the Ahld Lad hissel couldn't ha' kept a better look-out for Willy. What, afore he was right up the fell down came the clouds around him, and the dale was in the biggest storm either afore or since. Trees went over like pins, and the great flags that roof the church went off just like so many winnle-straws. Here and there bits of fence walls went flat, and the sheep were glad to cower where they could. And nobody dare go out to bring them in however. Everybody thought sair about poor Willie, but, then, sure-li he would have gotten into the shelter of some rock or hog-house. And about ten o'clock the wind dropped as sharp as it rose, the clouds lifted straight up from the fells—they didn't roll over and away at all, my great-grandmother said, and off the shepherd lads set to find any trace they could of Willie. There was a bit of moon, and that helped them above a bit. They ran up and down them fells as if they were flat, and in an hour all the next dale as well was on the look-out. For Willie hadn't managed to get across to see his lass. It was just coming light when red-headed Tom Mackereth come over that li'le knot of rocks behind the Cross, and who should he see sitting there but Willie. 'By gum, but thou's a nice one,' he shouted, and

then was just strucken dumb, for Willie, though sitting so natural-like, was a corp. Tom's red head went white at the sight, though he was nobbut two-and-thirty, and he was never the same man afterward. But in a minute or two he come enough to himself to shout to the other shepherds, and they all come together; from both dales they went like crows to the place. Some wouldn't believe that Willie was really dead until they touched him—and then there was no manner of doubt. His face hadn't changed a bit, he hadn't been wandering through bog and muck or ought like that. *He had been storm-struck* as he sat waiting for the storm to clear a bit, and was dead as could be.

"What's storm-struck? Nay, thou needn't laugh, for men are storm-struck on rough days on the fells, and that's why I don't like the lads to go out when it's over blustery. Why, there was three men and a lad killed over on the east fells not more than forty year ago in that way. They were lost for days, and when they were found, why, the bairn had a piece of bread in his hand that he'd been eating. And there was another, a quarryman over Buttermere way, coming down between his two sons when the wind was raging mighty wild. He was lifted off the track and carried up in the air, and when he come down he was dead, and neither of the lads were a bit worse. Aye, they said that in that pass when the wind was in the right quarter, what they called 'in the nick,' you could see the great gusts come bumming and banging

up the ginnel, and when they struck the rocks, why, they stood still all blue. There isn't much chance for a poor human when the Lord God talks with such strength and power."

But the old dame's story of Brideson's Cross was hotly contested by the other ancients, including Old Isaac himself, chiefly on the ground that she had never told them the tale before. But Mally recked nothing of that circumstance. "Isaac's told it his way for so many year that it wasn't mannerly to contradict him," was her calm answer. At every farm fireside there seemed to be a different version of the tale, and one got so tired of balancing the tales as to wish that the Boy had not pointed out the slab on the fell-side with its curious title and many name-scratchings. Old Joseph must tell one a story from his grandfather that Brideson was a sailor-man, who wandered about in the mists until exhausted. "Aye, and they said that Willy Longmire as found his body died worth a good deal more brass than he had ever addled." Some would have it that a jealous old dame had been found there demented, gasping the words, "Bride—son," after she had murdered both her son and the bride he had just brought to the white-walled steading beneath the tall sycamores.

Anyway the story of Brideson's Cross is a mystery to me, and that is the end of it.

SOME TALES OF THE MIST

"WHY-A, now, lads," said the farmer to the little knot of fell-ramblers who were making his kitchen their headquarters, "it's all right enough you talking, but men can get lost, and badly lost, on our fells. Even the shepherds go wrong at times, but nowt to what they used to. Things have altered a lot, and we like to travel if it be nobbut to Dungeon Ghyll on a fine Sunday in the back-end. But when I was a lad, what, hardly one had been into the next dale except maybe to a shepherds' meet, and then they were likest to go by road, or by the passes, or at odd times by the old smoots that few folk use nowadays, though when the passes were worse travelling, the old crow-dives across the moors saved a mort of time. What, many a man didn't ken the fell right across the dale from his own heaf, so no wonder they were clean maisled in t' mist. I had a writing chap here once, and he telled me an old story that had a lock of truth in it. It was about a tourist when he was leaving one dale-head and inquiring about lodgings in the next, and the old chap at t' farm said to him, 'Thou must call at sic a farm, the man is called William Tyson. Tell him that I sent thee, and he's sure to make thee welcome. I've never

seen him myself, but our sheep mingle on the high fells, and he's a good man.' That's just like what the flock-owners were in my father's time, afore the fells were all enclosed by Act of Parliament.

" However, it was small wonder that if one of the shepherds got off their own little bits of fell they were soon as lost as they could well be. And worse than all they would always try to get home no matter what the time and weather. They were as flayed as women at being out of sight of home. I's certain sure that it's better for folks to get a bit worried about a chap, than for that same fellow to loss his life wi' trying to get back. Certainly the fell-tracks weren't like they are to-day, and one might wander a dozen miles without coming across a fence. So it was that every now and again word would come round the dale that a shepherd was lost, and what ! we must be off, with lanterns and whatnot, to late him. There was never any time to be lost on such a job. We kenned gay weel that Jobby from the Hining was like to be at the public over on the pass, and first thing he didn't turn up, his folks sent there to make certain. But Tom Langhorne stepped over a crag in the dark and storm, and his thigh was broken. Tom laid helpless in a crack in the rock four days afore he was found, and he was never the same man at after. And in this dale and others there was like accidents. So whatever the upshot, we all turned out at the call, no matter who it was that was missing. I remember well being out all one wild night about Easter, for

two young ladies as had been seen on the pass just at dark'ning. We wrought this way and that, through snow and hail and rain, but neither us nor the shepherds from the other side could light on them at all. By gum! at daylight we found them—on a gurt rock in the tarn. They had somehow gotten into the water—maybe in the dark and rowk they thought it was just a big beck to be forded—and waded up to the waist afore they found out the mistake. Then the wind and waterfalls had drowned their shouts, and our lanterns didn't carry light more than a few yards. We soon had them ashore, though blest if that clumsy gowk, Joe Dickinson, hadn't to step into a great hole and go right overhead. Didn't he splodder and scream, as if he was in the middle of the sea!

"And more than once I've been called out at places where I have lived among the high fells to look for the shepherd as had gone wandering from his sheep. It's not easy to keep going straight forward in a regular storm of wind and snow. If one slants to right or to left, depend on it one is soon going round and round in a ring. What! we once come across Tommy Miles trudging away through the snow up on their fell, and saying, 'Well, I'll be hanged! there's four of them now going in front of me—the whole dale must be skifting.' He was that knocked up wi' work and worry that he didn't tumble to it that he was just following in his own tracks. I have heard tell that a lady was once out in the mist and got lost. She

thought she was going straight ahead all right until she picked up her own purse. Then she simply gave in and waited till it was daylight and the clouds lifted a bit. I've heard old men tell of times when they have been clean beat, didn't know which way to step—and that the mist had just thinned in front and shown them that they were within a hundred yards of their own fell gates, or maybe within a stone's throw of the dale they left hours before. And the way sound travels—it's gay queer. I have heard the cocks crowing at the farms a mile below, and at the same time gone within a score yards of a man shouting at the top of his voice wi'out hearing him at all. In all seasons and at all times one has been called out, and sometimes at little warrant. It's a bit bad to be out sixteen hours to find that the chap one has been after is sound asleep at home the while. Everybody had forgotten that he had gone to bed early. Didn't he have the laugh at us! There isn't much danger of a great fall over the crags, as one generally gets warning that something brant is coming by the broken edges of the rocks, but there's plenty of twelve-foot crags as can trap and smash a man up badly.

"But the worst of all was when, at dark'ning, word come that a li'le lad, about nine year old, was lost from a farm over the fell. He had gone up to the fell as usual to bring down the cows for milking. He had gotten to the fell all right, for he had stuck the gate wide open, and at milking-time

the cows had come down, a bit late, it was noticed. But the li'le lad didn't come, and for a bit he wasn't missed. But at supper-time his mother ca'ed and ca'ed, and he never put into sight. The mist was right down to the door, and in very little time the whole house was out. But the lad wasn't found either in the lane, or in the middle pasture, or in the top lot which opened on to the fell. I was never out on such a queer night, the air was dead still, and seemed to smother our shouts in our mouths. And that thick—lad, thou could hardly see thy feet. All night we wrought, groping here and groping there, in awful fear for the bairn, and when day dawned we were just as near as ever. Now there was a bit of wind, but the cloud sulked over and just hung as thick as ever. I was fairly done up and had to give up, but the lads held on till noon wi'out any luck at all. Down in the dale all sorts of tales were flying : the lad had been found in this dale and that, but every rumour turned out to be a lie. I did what had to be done among our cows and sheep : then laid down for two or three hours just as I was. Then away again, up this fell and down that dale, hunting and shouting in every slack and neuk among the crags. Man, it seemed hard to us that God Almighty never let those clouds lift a minute to show us where the poor bairn was lying dead. I said something of that to an old chap as I met at the top, but he roared out : ' No, d—— thee, it's the divvle's own work is that rowk. God'll never let a poor li'le bairn dee amang

this.' He shook his fist at the mist just lazily wemmling and curving round us, and ca'ed it just as it were a human thing.

"But, I'll tell thee what—that chap, whoever he was (I never saw him again) heartened us all up, and his words went from mouth to mouth among the shepherds and farmers: 'God'll never let a poor li'le bairn dee amang this,' was said by many a man living a poor outward sort of life, and egged him on to another try. Our heads reeled with thinking of this ginnel and that, of that and that bog and peat-hag. The third day was Sunday, and I'm sure not a man as could take the fell showed up at either church or chapel for ten parishes round. And every dog that could hirple on three legs was up on the fell. I was sore enough after days and nights of it—what the poor bairn's parents were I don't know, and I don't want to know—but to see men by scores taking their bits in a line covering miles of mist-bound fell and moor and marsh was grand. But though the fell was worked from every dale, not a sign of the li'le lad was to be found: dead or alive it was a mystery to us. And some of us who had had hours of hard searching in that dree white mask began to see and hear things as wasn't, couldn't be there, and I'm not shammed to say that I began to be frightened of the fells and of that cloud that crawled along steady, merciless, and never lifted clear for a moment. Oh, for one of God's good gales to burst it, smash it, roll it away.

" Monday we stuck at it, but on Tuesday, the fifth full day, one and all we began to lose heart. It did seem that God had forgotten the poor bairn, and that He wouldn't let us find his body. Then again at dark'ning came the call, but it was a glad call, and one that travelled faster than horses or men or even telegrams : ' Found, found, found ! ' We didn't cheer, and we didn't light bonfires, but I'll tell thee what, some of us prayed out our thanks in a way we'd never done afore.

" It seems as the li'le bairn had, on the Saturday, dropped down to the topmost house in one dale and asked the way back to his own home. The old man was near-sighted, and didn't notice that the bairn was young and near tewed out. So he showed him the way to the pass, which, of course, was thick-choked with mist, and the lad went wrong and wandering again. One night the lad had slept among some outlying sheep, and waited there hours, hoping that some one would come up and ' look ' them. But nobody did, and after a bit the sheep wandered away and he lost them.

" How did he get lost at the start ? He thought that a cow had gone through a wall-gap on to the fell, as it often did, and so he followed to find it and drive it home."

And finishing his tale with this, the old farmer knocked the ashes from his neglected pipe and shambled off to bed.

Richard Clay & Sons, Limited, London and Bungay.